P. O. angl.

18 m —

Asher

Each Volume
sold separately at the rate of 1 Mark 50 Pf.

ASHER'S COLLECTION

OF

ENGLISH AUTHORS

BRITISH AND AMERICAN.

VOL. 166.

THE REBEL OF THE FAMILY

BY

E. LYNN LINTON
Author of "Patricia Kemball" &c.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Vol. II.

HAMBURG.
KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.
1881.

The Volumes of this Series are Copyright for circulation in All Countries except Great Britain and its Colonies.

3037

COMPLETE LIST
OF
ASHER'S COLLECTION OF ENGLISH AUTHORS.

Each Volume sold separately, price 1s. 6d = Mark 1. 50.

Mrs. ALEXANDER:
The Wooing O't. 2 vols. (92/93.)
BEHIND the Veil. 2 vols. (79/80.)

WALTER BESANT and JAMES RICE:
Authors of "Ready-Money Mortiboy"—:
The Monks of Thelema. 2 vols. (147/148.)

R. D. BLACKMORE:
Clara Vaughan. 2 vols. (16/17.)

FRIEDR. BODENSTEDT:
Mirza Schaffy. Translated by E. d'Esterre. 1 vol. (146.)

M. E. BRADDON:
Robert Ainsleigh. 3 vols. (11/13.)
To the Bitter End. 3 vols. (41/43.)
Mill Dyarrell, and other Stories. 1 vol. (72.)

Lord BROUGHAM:
Albert Lunel. 2 vols. (28/29.)

RHODA BROUGHTON:
Good-bye, Sweetheart! 2 vols. (8/9.)

BEATRICE MAY BUTT:
Miss Molly. 1 vol. (114.)
Eugénie. 1 vol. (123.)

G. W. DASENT:
Three to One. 2 vols. (81/82.)

W. HEPWORTH DIXON:
The Life of W. Penn. 2 vols. (38/39.)

Miss BETHAM-EDWARDS:
Kitty. 2 vols. (48/49.)

GEORGE ELIOT:
Middlemarch. 4 vols. (1/4.)
The Legend of Jubal, and other Poems. 1 vol. (99.)

J. S. LE FANU:
The Room in the Dragon Volant. 1 vol. (27.)

B. L. FARJEON:
London's Heart. 2 vols. (84/85.)
FIRST in the Field. By the Author of "Recommended to Mercy." 2 vols. (90/91.)

JESSIE FOTHERGILL:
The Wellfields. 2 vols. (163/64).

Mrs. FRASER-TYTLER:
Margaret. 1 vol. (67.)

G. FREYTAG:
Ingo and Ingraban. 2 vols. (75/76.)

GERALD GRANT:
Coming Home to Roost. 2 vols. (68/69.)

IZA DUFFUS HARDY:
Glencairn. 2 vols. (121/122.)

THOMAS HARDY:
Under the Greenwood Tree. 1 vol. (53.)

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE:
Author of "The Scarlet Letter":
Septimius. 1 vol. (30.)

ROSA M. KETTLE:
Lord Maskelyne's Daughter 1 vol. (160).

Mad. KIBRIZLI MEHEMET PASHA:
Thirty Years in the Harem. 2 vols. (46/47.)

ASHER'S COLLECTION

OF

ENGLISH AUTHORS

Vol. 166.

THE REBEL OF THE FAMILY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE
REBEL OF THE FAMILY

BY

E. LYNN LINTON

AUTHOR OF
"PATRICIA KEMBALL," "THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,"
"THE WORLD WELL LOST," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

HAMBURG.
KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.
1881.

BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Train Laid	1
II.	The Match Applied	21
III.	Laurel or Cypress?	39
IV.	On the Old Way	56
V.	The Great Mogul	74
VI.	At the Play	94
VII.	The Alternative	112
VIII.	Uncertain and Perplexed	134
IX.	In the Day of Trouble	151
X.	The Crawford Skeleton	168
XI.	The Golden Ball	183
XII.	Et Tu, Brute?	202
XIII.	Within the Sheepfold	225

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIV.	The Scapegoat	246
XV.	To the Rescue	266
XVI.	Looking Up	286
XVII.	Confessed	303
XVIII.	The Toils Unloosed	325

THE REBEL OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIN LAID.

THERE was a dance at the casino to-night, and the Winstanleys were going. As they were here they might as well profit by such amusements as were to be had; and though these balls at the casino were certainly quite un-English, still they amused the child, and that was everything. It was so natural that she should like to be amused and that they, the staid elder sister and the indulgent mother, should like to see her pleased!

So said Mrs. Winstanley to her compatriots when half-explaining half-excusing an action which really wanted neither explanation nor excuse. Had she been quite clear in her conscience—had she not been guilty of coquetting with chances in the person of Bois-Duval—she would not have made

that little speech. It was a defence and a shield, a blind and a mask, and she thought herself well concealed behind it. And when the young men said "Of course," things looked smooth and pleasant enough, and the circumstances of the evening were accepted as simply as if public dances at a foreign casino were part of the ordinary experience of well-born English ladies.

Hubert and Sir James went up together to ask Eva for the first waltz. It was a friendly kind of rivalry, in which neither was jealous of the other, though each desired to win. But little Eva shook her head.

"I am awfully sorry," she said, making up a distractingly pretty and penitent face. "I cannot help it, you know, but I am engaged to the Vicomte. He asked me first, so what could I do?"

"What a shame!" cried Hubert hotly.

"That fascinating gentleman certainly understands the value of the 'forelock,' as he calls it," said Sir James with a sneer.

"Yes, doesn't he?" returned Eva innocently. "He isso awfully quick! He is not like you Englishmen, who are so nice and deliberate, but he takes one's breath away like a whirlwind!"

"It is vilely bad form to be like a whirlwind, as you say," said Hubert angrily.

"Yes, isn't it?" returned Eva; "but if one gets into one, what can one do? I feel just like a stick or a straw or a feather, when I am with

those kind of people," she added in her peculiar grammar, making another distracting face.

"But, my dear child, you should not make engagements so long beforehand with such comparative strangers," said Mrs. Winstanley.

Now that her two great hopes had turned up, she would have been glad to have shunted the French Viscount, or at most to have made use of him as a spur to the resolution of these others.

"What could I say, mumsey, when he asked me?" pleaded Eva. "I could not tell a story, you know, and say that I was engaged when I wasn't, could I?"

"You should have made him feel that his request was inconvenient," said Mrs. Winstanley. "It is not as if we knew either him or the Baron intimately—as if we knew them like Sir James and Mr. Strangways. It was very thoughtless of him, and you were not quite up to the mark, my child."

"I am too young for that kind of thing, mumsey," said Eva, lifting up her blue eyes sweetly. "I don't think I shall ever learn to be diplomatic. At all events, I am too young yet."

"Yes, yes, so you are. You are too young and fresh for anything but your own sweet candid innocence," said Sir James.

"And you will always be too frank for diplomacy, I hope," echoed Hubert with a flush.

"Too frank to repress undesirable attentions?"

said Mrs. Winstanley pleasantly. "My dear boy, we poor women would come off but ill in life if we could not use our only power of protection—the art of freezing and repelling."

"Yes, I know; but Miss Eva is so perfect as she is, one wants no change in her—at least not yet," said poor Hubert, full of his stupid admiration.

"How nice!" said Eva gaily.

"But when did the Vicomte ask you? and when did you engage yourself, dear?" asked Thomasina in a rather low voice.

Eva did not hear.

"I only wish I could cut myself into three Evas!" she said prettily, looking first at Sir James and then at Hubert. "But I can't, can I?"

"But when did you promise the Vicomte?" repeated Thomasina; and this time Eva was obliged to hear.

"This morning in the tent," she answered quite frankly.

"Indeed! I did not hear you," said her sister, arching her eyebrows.

"No, you were all talking about the races," answered Eva; "but M. le Vicomte was not so rude," with a fresh bird-like cadenza that enchanted and distracted Hubert, while it excited and did not quite satisfy Sir James.

Thomasina said no more. She had not asked for spite, only to make sure; and now she was sure that something more than she knew was

going on between the Vicomte and her sister. She did not suppose it was much; but it was something.

All this took place as they were strolling towards the casino; and the discussion ended as they reached the door. Sir James was obliged to be content with only the third dance, Eva having voluntarily offered herself to Hubert for the second, as he had been the first to ask her.

"I think you might have left that to me," said Sir James in an aggrieved tone to his friend.

Though they were brothers in their joint resistance to these foreigners, and standing shoulder to shoulder in close alliance of abhorrence, and though there was no suspicion as yet one of the other, and no perception of the truth, still there were possibilities of enmity if things became too evident; and Sir James was as jealous as Hubert was rash and impassioned.

"First come first served!" said Hubert in a good-humoured way, as Bois-Duval had said before him. "Besides, I could scarcely be expected to give up that dance, even to you, old man!"

He had got the prize and could afford to be gay-tempered.

"Why the devil did you put yourself forward at all?" cried James irritably. "In your circumstances, Hubert, you should be more careful than you are. You lay yourself open to nasty

remarks, and have cut me out most unpleasantly where it can be nothing to you."

Hubert turned first red and then pale. He bit his cheek, as his manner was when annoyed: but presently his honest face cleared as he looked into his friend's and held out his hand.

"Come, old fellow, no misunderstandings between us," he said pleasantly. "We have been friends too long for that."

"Friends or not, I suffer no man to cross my path," answered Sir Jomes stiffly; and with this the two followed the ladies into the dancing-room, and the business of the evening began. So far the preface had not been very harmonious; it remained now to see what the end would be.

The music struck up and M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval came to demand the honour of Miss Eva's hand for the waltz about to begin; and Eva with the prettiest, most bashful, most fawn-like kind of look to her mother, rose and took his arm, and was soon whirling about the room like a pretty pale-blue teetotum with a golden head and a wooden heart.

Hubert took Thomasina, to have at least a pretext for hovering about his unconfessed divinity; while Sir James sat by Mrs. Winstanley eating out his heart with moody jealousy, and more than half-inclined to throw the whole thing up now at once and go back to England and Mrs. Merton, as at least safe and worthy if not wholly satisfactory.

The waltz ended without any contretemps, and Eva had no cause to complain that Bois-Duval was either a cold wooer or a prosaic interpreter. She had never been deluged with so much delicious flattery—never been swept away in such a fervid whirlwind of love-making. Frightened while intoxicated, she listened with lowered lids and crimson cheeks, and wished it was not wrong nor dangerous. She knew that she was playing with fire—that this was not the kind of thing her mother would sanction, nor was it the kind of thing that Bois-Duval ought to do, or would have done, had all been really right; yet she could not resist, still less rebuke. It was very naughty, it was very dangerous—but it was very delightful; and Bois-Duval had at least the merit of rousing in her something that was more real than anything she had hitherto felt or made believe to show. Even Hubert Strangways who, up to now, had been her chief personal favourite, was distanced without mercy by this clever and audacious diplomatist; while Sir James, whose title and fortune had been her principal magnets outside her irrepressible desire for 'conquest,' sank far far into the background—his high-strung, nervous, melancholy temperament and poetic pessimism seeming to her just unmitigated boredom when contrasted with the gay insouciance, the delicious daring and that absence of all inconvenient restraint by principle which characterized her French 'flame.' But it was all

very naughty and very dangerous; and she knew that she was running grave risks, and that the day of reckoning would be heavy when it came.

Then the dance ended and she was brought back with all due decorum to her mother. M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval knew his social grammar too well to commit unnecessary solecisms. When he offended against the syntax endorsed by Mrs. Grundy it was for some good purpose; but as at the present moment nothing was to be gained by keeping the little girl beyond the time formally allowed by conventional propriety, he delivered her up as he was bound to do—but he delivered her up engaged for at least five out of the twelve dances on the card.

And when she danced with Hubert, she found him heavy to talk to and clumsy to dance with; while Sir James was decidedly stiff and uncongenial and did not amuse her anyhow.

Then came another turn with Bois-Duval; more ill-humour from the Englishmen; more perplexity from Mrs. Winstanley; and more surety of conviction from Thomasina that something was going on between these two more than was prudent, and that she would set herself to the discovery, and make it.

At the end of the second waltz with Bois-Duval, Eva disappeared from the ball-room. No one had seen her go and no one knew where she had gone; for the two young men were dancing

—one with Thomasina, and the other with a pretty little French girl of fifteen by looks and twenty-two by dates; and Mrs. Winstanley was occupied with a friendly neighbour placed there by Bois-Duval purposely to call off her attention. Thus, when the last chord sounded from the orchestra and the moving kaleidoscope on the floor dissolved, Eva and her partner were not forthcoming, and were not to be seen anywhere.

Much indignation and even terror broke out among the friends waiting there to receive her. "Where is she?"—"Have you seen her?" passed from lip to lip. Mrs. Winstanley half rose.

"Naughty child! I must go and look for her," she said, her handsome face a trifle stern and blanched.

"No, do you sit here, Mrs. Winstanley. I will go," said Sir James.

"We will go," echoed Hubert; and the two went off quickly, even before Mrs. Winstanley had given her consent.

Nothing of vital consequence had happened to the child. Bois-Duval had only taken her into the corridor which was filled with people, and where, though he might say what he liked, he could not even take her hand, for the number of eyes about. To our way of thinking it was a perfectly harmless and legitimate thing to do; according to the French standard of morality it

was an offence, and highly improper. You may sit with your young partner on the topmost step of the dark stairs, or be alone with her in the conservatory where you are concealed by the camellias and the palms, if you are in an English house — and yet not irretrievably damage her character. If you parade your ingénue in a well-lighted corridor crammed with people in a French casino, it is death and destruction to her repute, and her friends would have the right to demand an explanation. But Bois-Duval was a man of nerve, and held to the doctrine that it is no part of a man's duty to take care of a woman's character. That belongs to herself if she be married, to her mother if she be a maiden. If the one chooses to go to the devil, why prevent her? if the other is not guarded by the mother's vigilance, peste! was he to be the nursemaid? This pretty little English girl liked being made love to as much as he liked to make that love; and it was not for him to be ungrateful to opportunity.

To do him justice no man was more grateful; and at this moment he was vigorously improving the occasion when suddenly the stalwart figure of Hubert and the pale, keen face of Sir James Kearney were seen in the distance as the two young men made their way straight to the place where Eva was sitting with Bois-Duval in the shadow of a friendly column.

"Your mother has desired us to take you back

to her without a moment's delay, Miss Winstanley," said Sir James.

He spoke with extreme stiffness, severity and authority; like an angry brother who was justly offended and who expected to be obeyed. As he spoke he offered the little sinner his arm.

The Vicomte took the girl's hand and drew it within his own arm. They were all standing.

"Pardon!" he said gravely. "This young lady belongs to me. I will deliver her into the hands of her mother."

"Miss Winstanley, your mother wished *us* to take you back," reiterated Sir James, not answering the Frenchman and emphasizing the pronoun.

"Is this your pleasure, mademoiselle?" asked Bois-Duval with a look that made her tremble, partly for dread of losing him as a lover should she offend him by going with her compatriots, and partly for dread of being punished by his betrayal of her folly should she rasp his self-love.

"No!" she said with a really heroic assumption of childish ingenuousness to hide her very real trouble; "I am not going to be handed about like a great ball of silk. We will all go back to mother together. That will be quite a royal escort!" she added with her merry laugh.

"Thank you," said the Vicomte, still grave and intense, holding her hand closely pressed against his side and leading the way in triumph.

"Monsieur," said Sir James livid with rage; "in England we respect authority."

"And in France, monsieur, we respect innocence," returned Bois-Duval, the 'beau phraseur,' again pressing Eva's hand against his side as the practical exemplification of his epigram.

"We shall hear next that they have found out how to make gold in France," said Hubert with a snort of defiance. "The one is about as true as the other!"

"In France, monsieur, we make gentlemen," said Bois-Duval coldly; "do you consider this in England as rare a creation as the making of gold?"

"According to the country, yes," said Hubert. "In some countries it is very rare."

"I agree with you," said Bois-Duval, looking at the young men by turns. "As you say, monsieur, it is in some countries very rare. But that country is not la belle France!"

At that moment a rather large and noisy group came surging up from the dance-room and separated the two Englishmen from Eva and the Vicomte.

"I should like to knock that puppy down!" said Hubert in a voice that disdained caution. "His insolence shall be checked—that I swear!"

"Leave him to me," said Sir James irritably. "Why the deuce should you interfere, Hubert? He is more my affair than yours."

"And he is as much mine as yours," returned Hubert with undeniable warmth.

By which it was evident that the annoyance of the moment was serious enough to endanger friendship as well as to create enmity.

"I am glad to have humiliated your compatriots, ma belle," said Bois-Duval in a low voice to Eva.

"How naughty of you!" said Eva, with a laugh.

"How nice, you mean to say! If you have any compassion for me, any love for me, ma chérie, as I think you have, you will be pleased at my victory—as you are; is it not so?"

"I am pleased if you are;" said Eva, fluttered.

"Any proof of the superiority of a French gentleman counts for my good," said the Vicomte superbly.

"Oh, I think Frenchmen delightful!" cried Eva.

"One—not all; only one," he returned.

She looked up at him, doing her best to be simple; but nature was too strong; and she dropped her eyes, blushing with a delicious kind of tremor at the dangers and delights of the enchanted wood into which she had voluntarily wandered.

By this time they had got back to the dancing-room, where the Vicomte took her to her place and deposited her on the seat next her mother; leaving her to fight the battle in her own way, and thinking that he himself would be best out of it.

"Where have you been, Eva?" asked Mrs. Winstanley, for her quite sharply. "You know you are not allowed to go out of the room."

"It was so hot, mumsey! I only went into the corridor for a little fresh air," replied Eva, with cheerful innocence.

"How can you be so imprudent, Eva?" said Thomasina. "You know this kind of thing is not considered proper in France. We are not in England: why will you be so silly!"

"Oh, she meant no harm!" said good-hearted Hubert, who winced under those rebukes far more than did Eva herself; "but that coxcomb knew that he was landing her in a hole. It is he who deserves rowing, not poor Miss Eva."

"You are always so good and kind!" said Mrs. Winstanley, who had her own reasons for being strict on this matter before them. "But Eva has been very imprudent indeed. She must really learn to be more considerate. Nothing but her extreme youth and ignorance of the world can possibly justify her."

"And these do," said Sir James, a slight dash of pedantry in his tone.

"Yes; so please Mrs. Winstanley let poor Miss Eva off for this once. She will know better another time," Hubert said, again making himself the pretty little sinner's advocate.

They all spoke as if Eva had been just a naughty child who had stolen a bon-bon or broken

her doll; and no one seemed conscious of the absurdity and pretence of the whole matter, when treating of a girl, round whom three men were fluttering, each of whom was jealous of the others.

"How cross you are all to me!—poor little me, what have I done? What harm was there in going into the corridor for a little fresh air!" cried Eva with a pretty pout. "One would think I had done something really wrong!"

"Nothing absolutely wrong perhaps, but something very imprudent, my dear child," said Mrs. Winstanley, still grave if forgiving. "It would have been wrong had you been older and known better. As it is, you are to be pardoned on consideration of your ignorance."

"Now you are a dear darling mumsey again," said Eva, kissing her mother in the face of the multitude. "And now you shall have some sweeties! Only if you promise to be good though, and won't scold me any more?" she added, holding back the box and looking round from each to each with a grave inquiring air.

Mrs. Winstanley smiled.

"What a child it is!" she said pleasantly. "My dear Eva, will you ever become a woman?"

"Now for the sweeties, Miss Eva!" cried Hubert joyously.

He looked on the bon-bons as the ratification of the pardon just granted; and perhaps no one

was so relieved as he at the happy ending of this difficulty.

"Here they are!" said Eva, bringing out of her satchel pocket a small box of chocolate creams. "That nice dear M. le Vicomte whom you all abuse so much, and who is such a dear kind old thing, gave them to me; which is what neither of you have done!"

Mrs. Winstanley shrugged her shoulders as if she had been a Frenchwoman born.

"So! he treats you as a spoilt child, like every one else!" she said, glancing with a smile first at Sir James, then at the rest, as if this explained everything. There could be nothing serious in an affair wherein the girl was given chocolate creams and treated like a spoilt child all through!

But Thomasina, looking curiously at the little box in Eva's hand, recognized it as one which she herself had bought this very afternoon at the confectioner's and given to her sister who had begged for it.

The whole incident, imprudent as it had been, passed without further remark for the moment; but there were black looks without disguise and emphatic ejaculations not given in whisper when M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval came again to claim the promise given by Mademoiselle Eva, for another waltz. Nothing was to be done however; and unless Mrs. Winstanley was prepared to break with her French friend she must give her consent

as of course and let her daughter dance with him as with any other person in the room. The home authorities were forced to content themselves with watching the two as they whirled about, now fast, now slow, now with breathless vehemence and now with tender languor. They watched in vain. Despite those eight eyes so sharply fixed on them the Vicomte managed to slip into Eva's hand a note which he had written in the interval between the maternal lecture and this delicious waltz; and Eva managed to secure it in the bosom of her gown without one of the four watchers having the faintest idea of the transaction. Love laughs not only at locksmiths but at Argus himself; and there has never yet been found the spell which he could not break when he would.

The evening passed without more disturbance. M. le Vicomte, conscious of his misdemeanour and properly penitent, took care not to transgress again. He danced frequently with Eva; but then this is the fashion of the place. It is not an offence against decorum, as in England, but a mark of politeness and the expression of care and protection. He danced also with Thomasina as often as he found her disengaged; and sometimes he sat out and talked to Mrs. Winstanley when both her daughters were dancing with the Englishmen. He managed all the little threads with consummate skill, and got the mother so far on his side as to make her feel that coldness on her part would be boorish

and displeasure ill-breeding, and that really this handsome versatile English-speaking young Frenchman was a delightful creature all round, and those foolish boys *must* accept him.

Thus the little hitch created in the beginning of the evening by his impropriety and Eva's imprudence seemed to be quite got over; and by the time the last dance came to an end the whole thing was apparently laid as straight and smooth as if that embarrassing kink had never been.

But appearances are rarely faithful exponents of things, as the words which passed between the two pairs of friends plainly proved.

"I shall insult that fellow," said Hubert passionately. "I am only waiting for the opportunity."

"Keep your hands to yourself," said Sir James drily. "I will do that business."

"No—it is my affair," said Hubert.

"My dear fellow, don't talk rubbish," returned Sir James hastily. "You are an engaged man. I am not. If we are to have a row, it is better for me to be in it, not you."

"Engaged or not, the Winstanleys are my friends as well as yours, Jamie; and mine before they were yours," said Hubert.

"Your friends, yes; but perhaps something more to me," Sir James replied, speaking slowly and keeping his eyes fixed on his friend.

"Good God, Jamie! do you mean to say you love her?" cried Hubert in extreme agitation.

"Yes; I do love her," the other answered, still speaking slowly.

"Her? but which? tell me, James—which of them?"

"You must be blind to ask that, old man! Which? Well—not Thomasina! What is the matter, Hubert? Are you ill?"

"No, nothing—nothing—there is nothing the matter with me," stammered the young fellow. "That cursed waltzing has made me feel a little sick, that is all. It is nothing, Jamie; don't look like that, old man. I am all right, I assure you."

"Take a B. and S. and turn in. A night's rest will put you square," said Sir James.

"Yes, that is all I want. I want just that," returned Hubert as quietly as he could speak. "Good-night, old fellow."

"Good-night, old man. You'll be all right to-morrow morning," said Sir James; and the two parted—the one enlightened but the other as dark as before.

The Frenchmen were more discerning.

"Which is it?" asked Laperrière. "The big blond or the dark milord?"

"Both," answered Bois-Duval.

His friend gave an expressive whistle.

"Ma foi," he said laughing; "the Britannic pot boils!"

"Boils? do you call that tepid simmer boiling? I do not," said Bois-Duval. "Those flabby sons

of Albion never boil. They have swallowed too much frost and fog."

"And my friend, M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval, does boil in faith," laughed Laperrière.

"I hope so. Life would not be worth the trouble of boots and gloves if I had not more fire than those stiff-backed English marionettes," he returned. "Poor wretches, they are to be pitied! However, each does his best in this world; and for the present these two feel what it pleases them to call love for the pretty little demoiselle."

"And she?"

"Bah! our ingénue is a finished coquette and takes all who come with grand impartiality! I flatter myself that since she has had the benefit of my lessons she has no great weakness for either of her compatriots. But she makes believe, and so holds the stage; and they, the louts, see nothing, but have gone head downwards into her traps. They are destined to receive their lesson. I have it all in train."

"For which? the big blond?"

"Without question. He will make the best mark," answered the Vicomte with masterly coolness. "Though I intend to fight, I do not intend to die. I prefer laurel to cypress and the little one's kisses to her tears."

"There is always risk in these affairs; and the big blond looks dangerous," said Laperrière.

"As a buffalo, who makes an ugly rush with

his eyes shut and his head down. You spring aside, phew! the great big stumbling brute is caught in the toils or dashes himself down a precipice. No; I don't fear that big blond, my friend. The milord is more dangerous."

"If it were my own affair I should rejoice-but for you, my friend——" said Laperrière, with a tremulous kind of hesitation.

"It must be done. It is for the honour of France, as well as to punish poaching and presumption," returned Bois-Duval, lightly striking his breast. "These miserable creatures permitted themselves to ridicule the sublime heroism of our history and dared to talk of Waterloo. What would you have me do? The honour of France and the dignity of my manhood both demand this duel."

"You are right, my friend," said Laperrière, catching his tone. "As you say, when the honour of France is in question, there can be no doubt or hesitation."

Then the two shook hands; took a grog apiece; and went to bed, saying with a significant look and tone as they parted: "To-morrow!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MATCH APPLIED.

THERE was no question about the probable fineness of the day. The weather was settled to fair

with a constancy of which our capricious old climate knows nothing; and prophecy or discussion on that which was fixed as fate was mere waste of time. It was hot, certainly; and the road from Trouville to Deauville, short as it was, was a very desert for dust; but there are worse things than heat borne in pleasant company with pretty faces under rosepink umbrellas; and the daintiest and most coquettish wrappers imaginable—wrappers which made the ladies as they rolled past look like so many flowers in great grey calices which would presently unfold and display the full gorgeousness of the petals beneath.

All the beauty and fashion of Trouville and Havre, Êtretat and Honfleur, a sprinkling of grandees from London following in the wake of an Exalted Personage, and a contingent of the 'fine fleur' from Paris assembled on the Deauville racecourse to-day. The Trouville sands were deserted, save by a few nurses with their children and here and there a sober bourgeois family which took its pleasure cheaply and preferred to watch the waves and the seagulls rather than to bet on the hoofs of a string of horses galloping past a shouting mob;—or it might be a pair of young lovers newly wed, who in their turn preferred solitude and unrestricted love-making to the gaiety, distraction, and enforced propriety of a crowd;—while at Deauville there was scarcely

standing-place on the course, and no one gave his neighbour courteous elbow-room.

It was a bright and animated show. The pretty toilettes worn as only Frenchwomen can wear them; the smart well-got-up look of the young men; the grave severity of the police, dark, silent, mysterious—the executive skeletons of the feast; the more cheerful swagger of the gendarmes, those generals in calico; the fraternal mingling of uniforms and blouses; the peasant women in their white caps and showy colours; the total absence of squalor, dirt, second-hand finery, miserable pretence, together with the bright sun, the glittering sea, the wooded hills and the lovely country everywhere—all make a race-day and a race-course of exceptional charm.

It might have been thought that even the most spiteful Gallophobist would have confessed the brilliant influences of the moment; but both Hubert and Sir James voted the whole thing slow and in no wise equal to Ascot or the Derby. They wondered how people could say so much about these humbugging Deauville races when we did things so much better at home! But some people were determined to find everything better ordered in France, whatever it might be. To be French was to be all right; to be English all wrong. Frenchmen were better bred and Frenchwomen were prettier than Englishmen and women; French manners were more polite, French customs more

delightful, even French races were more enjoyable —though every one knows that the English have gone ahead of all the world in the matter of horse-flesh, and that no Frenchman can ride or drive better than the average English tailor or blue-jacket! It was revolting to see such folly, all because the sky was hard, monotonous and blue, and the sun glared down with such force it seemed to shrivel up your very marrow! And when you had said that you had said everything.

Which settled the question so far comfortably between them, and gave their ill-humour the look of reasonableness, at least to themselves.

For they were at this moment decidedly ill-tempered, else they would not have plumed themselves on talking nonsense.

Of course no break large enough for the whole party had been found in Trouville; and the Vicomte's carriage did not hold more than four inside, with the coachman and Laperrière on the box. Thus the two young men had been forced to drive over in a wretched little shandradan in such patience as they could command, knowing that they were in the wash of the big boat—in the dust of the triumphal car. It was an ignominious position for two young men of fortune and family—proud of themselves and their nation, their developed muscles and their inherited acres, and with the true British contempt for all foreigners what-soever—but perhaps most of all for Mounseer,

that ancient foe across the water. They felt it keenly; but of the two Sir James was perhaps the more disdainful and Hubert the more angry.

Poor Hubert indeed was in an abnormal state altogether to-day. He was still reeling under the blow of his friend's confession, but trying to pluck up courage to leave temptation, Eva and Trouville by the first train to-morrow morning, and go back to duty and Maud Disney. The knowledge that his friend loved this beautiful little idol of his dreams, roused him to a full consciousness of his own position, its dishonour and what should be its hopelessness; and he was working hard and loyally to clear and strengthen his heart. But he could not get things settled; and he was knocked about between love and duty till be felt sore and bruised all over. No sooner had he taken firm hold of the one than the other dragged him away —no sooner had conscience commanded than desire pleaded—and when desire determined, then conscience forbade.

The state of turmoil and uncertainty in which he stood showed itself on his face; and his temper and bearing to-day had a totally different expression from that which was natural to him.

Sir James saw that something was wrong, but he left that something alone. It was not his duty to dry-nurse his friend; and the less said the better when there was nothing pleasant to say and there might be a great deal that was disagreeable to

hear. He was sorry to see Hubert look so 'down,' but he supposed he was seedy from last night and would soon pull himself together. And as he himself hated to be worried and made a fuss with when he was seedy, he did by Hubert as he would be done by, and forebore to bother him with questions or commentary. But they were not a very lively couple on this brilliant sunshiny day of amusement; and their appearance somewhat justified old Froissart's famous saying about the English and the melancholy manner in which they take their pleasure.

The race-course was as disappointing as the way thither had been. There was no getting near the Winstanleys save in a sense by permission—when they were allowed to pick up the crumbs left by the rich men of the feast. Only in the intervals between the races when the Frenchmen went to make their bets with the book-makers behind the stand—only then could the two poor distanced Englishmen take brief possession of the vacated places and sun themselves in the treacherous light of those bright blue flattering eyes.

How bright they were! how treacherous their light and what flattering falsities they said! How they looked to each in turn as if with special love and liking!—love and liking, be it understood, such as a maiden and ingénue might give. They threw poor Hubert deeper and deeper into the fog of doubt, of distraction, of uncertain balance, of secret

dishonour, of acted untruth; and they touched the keen and passionate sensibilities of the young baronet, till he lost that clear possession of his own dignity which was his by nature, and even abased his pride so far as to let himself be made a kind of almsman subsisting by the bounty of a Frenchman.

Then, when the money business was over—when the old bills were settled and new ones made and the two Amphitryons returned to take possession—those large blue eyes spoke volumes to Bois-Duval by the very care with which they avoided looking at him at all. And this conscious bashfulness was more eloquent than the bolder coquetry played off on the others. His notes were in the bosom of her dress; his hand met hers under cover of friendly folds and flirting fans, and his expressive touch was returned with a fainter but all the same an undeniable pressure. He could afford then not to meet those bewildering eyes in prolonged straight looks, such as were given to the others, and even to feel specially distinguished by her shyness. But the whole position was tantalizing; and Bois-Duval was resolved to make the little girl commit herself more boldly. Playing with fire might be a pastime for her, but what about that fire itself?—and the risk? Houses once lighted cannot be extinguished at pleasure; and if the tepid sons of Albion are manageable by coquettes, the warmer lovers of la belle France are not. But

all this was in abeyance for the moment, and only the caressing flatteries of that little hand, the shy confession of those big blue eyes, stood as the language between them.

Meanwhile, Hubert Strangways and Sir James Kearney picked up the crumbs with craven gratitude to her—hot and fiery indignation against him. It was almost more than they could bear when the course was cleared and the stand began to fill with its appointed occupants, as the jockeys rode out, to have to yield to the force of circumstances and retire to their own remote places. They felt like hedge-sparrows whom the cuckoo has shouldered out of their rightful nests, and longed to have it out with that cuckoo; as indeed they would. They were only waiting their opportunity; and opportunity comes to all who know how to wait.

There was no 'good time' for them anyhow. Even when the Winstanleys descended from the stand and paraded the enclosure with the other beauties of the day and place, even then the Frenchmen took the lead and left the Englishmen in the wash. The mother was between the two daughters, and the line was flanked by Bois-Duval on the one side near Eva, and by Laperrière on the other near Thomasina. Where then was room or place for Hubert and Sir James? They could not break the line. French custom demands that a mother should keep her daughters by her side

in public; and English good-breeding prevented a public scrimmage and a fight with fisticuffs for forcible possession. Unless the two unlucky hedge-sparrows chose to walk behind and talk to their fair friends through the backs of their heads, they were no better off in the promenade than on the stand. It was all very humiliating—very disappointing—and both wished they had never come to Trouville at all, or that, being here, they had some kind of chance given them for cutting out those cursed Frenchmen:—as they could, of course, if they had but that chance!

It was embarrassing for Mrs. Winstanley too, and she heartily wished that things had been different; but she was in a cleft stick and could not help herself. It had seemed to her better policy at the time to accept the offer made by these men to be taken comfortably and free of expence to the races, than to wait on the chance of Sir James and Hubert Strangways turning up in time. If any hitch had occurred and they had not come, then she would have had to spend four or five pounds on the diversion into which it was part of her present duty and social existence to enter. And four or five pounds spent, where it could be saved, was a loss not to be lightly undertaken.

As things had turned out it was a pity—a thousand pities! as she said to Thomasina; and she was as much disgusted with fortune and as

cross with fortune's manikins as a well-bred lady ever permits herself to be. It was the realization of those detestable old adages about too many irons in the fire and sitting on two stools at once—and yet no one was to be blamed, though she and her plans had in a certain sense come to the ground. Certainly she herself was not to be blamed!

She did her best to make square things round, and to rub off spiky corners, by being specially sweet and maternal to the hedge-sparrows when they fluttered down for a moment to pick up their crumbs. But it was hard work. Naturally she was in polite slavery to the men who had franked her and given her and hers this pleasure for the payment of pleasant looks and exclusive devotion; but she had her chances in England to consider as well as those which were offered here; and it was her duty to keep her eggs well divided among her various baskets.

Thomasina understood the position as well as her mother, and she made better play because she was less bound by responsibility. She had never favoured the Gallic coalition and had always voted for constancy to the British chances. Unfortunately, Eva's persistence and restless need of excitement carried the day over her calmer counsel; and Mrs. Winstanley, who had brought herself to believe that it was her wisest policy to satisfy the child at all risks—she being her best investment

—let herself be persuaded by the one who was least able to reason aright or to see beyond the mist of the moment, and was thus bound in the chain of her own actions. Thomasina, freer, did the best she could by being more glacial to the Frenchmen than she would have been had not Sir James been there to fume and Hubert to rage. She was so cold, so still, so unresponsive, that to those lively, hot-blooded Parisians she was just a wet blanket of fine and silky texture; very lovely to look at, but decidedly uncomfortable to sensitive skins. On the other hand she was quite sisterly to the poor dear fellows wo had been so unmercifully shouldered out of their expected places. She was really a comfort to them; a kind of angelic godmamma who gave them secret manna and spiritual balm, and somehow trimmed up the ugly edges of the truth so that it looked less ragged and distasteful than it was in real earnest.

She played her part of silent peace-maker to perfection; and Mrs. Winstanley felt again, as so often before, that her good Thomasina was the staff and stay of her steps, and that without her she should simply collapse. But her very usefulness made the mother feel more and more strongly the necessity of getting Eva married the first of her brood. Perdita did not count; indeed she was almost forgotten in these latter days. But Eva must be married before her eldest sister. She, the mother, would be so entirely at sea without that

far-seeing Mentor, that wise young Ulysses in a tied-back skirt and long straight folds! She could not face the restless requirements, the unwise demands of the child if she had not her eldest to turn to for counsel, for support and for aid. And this determination to endow Eva because she was naughty, before Thomasina who was good, was only another instance of that melancholy truth which pervades all life—that unwritten law which ordains that the better you behave the more you knock down your own fortunes, and the more selfish and unfeeling you are the more you advance them. If virtue were not its own reward the poor hungry empty-handed saint would have none at all!

The races went on in their course, and now one and now the other of the owners and the backers lost, according to the merit of the animals and the skill of the jockeys. Hubert and Sir James betted behind the stand like the rest—a little more freely than the average Frenchman, and with persistent ill-luck. And this again did not tend to make things pleasanter. Though the money dropped over the purple and orange, with more sent to keep it company over the red and blue, represented no personal sacrifice to the young fellows—no more than if they had lost a box of cigars which they could replace at the next tobacconist's—yet, naturally enough, it annoyed them

to lose; and especially to lose to Frenchmen over French horses.

"Those humbugging animals!" they said with pettish contempt; "who on earth can tell how they will run or what they will do! And how do we know that they run straight at all!"

Had they plunged over an English race they would have taken their punishment like lambs; and had they lost even heavily to-day, yet been the sworn and recognized cavaliers of the Winstanleys, they would have come up smiling from the douche and thought no more about it. As things were, it was too irritating—too disgusting; and they fell foul of French stables and stablemen as if the whole concern were a den of thieves, because two Parisians had cut them out with three Englishwomen and reduced them to the condition of eclipsed satellites.

They had managed, however, to slip in a few bets of gloves and bouquets, of bon-bons and chocolates, which they took care should be 'morals' against themselves. The girls had by now a formidable amount of pretty trifles to receive; and Mrs. Winstanley felt that Providence was kind and watchful when she reckoned up the number of dozens secured to her daughters and written off the bills of the future. But at the last race of all, Hubert, to have the charm of a gift from the little witch who was misleading them all so impartially, induced Eva to back a hopeless screw for a pair of

gloves and the second place. The beast had not the ghost of a chance, so Sir James said; "he ran only on three legs;" and the 'moral' was certain. Hubert knew that he should win and that Eva would lose; but he wanted those gloves. He intended to keep them as a sacred possession for all his life. Perhaps he would have them worked in seed-pearls; framed in gold; put under a glass case as if they were holy relics; labelled mysteriously so that no one should suspect and no one have reason to ask why they were so honoured; perhaps he would have them buried with him—these dear gloves, which in truth he was 'going for,' perhaps more entirely than he himself knew. It was to be the one little bit of brightness in this disappointing day; and he watched the race with as much interest as if the screw had had a chance, with more than a pair of white kid gloves, No. eight and a half, depending on the issue. A trail of colour, a deafening roar, the winner his own length ahead and the screw nowhere—this was the race; and to Hubert the culminating point of the day. He had gone for the gloves—and he had won them.

"Oh, no, what a story!" said Eva, when Hubert went up to her with a flushed face, almost too much in earnest for tact, and said in a moved voice: "Now then, Miss Eva you will give me the gloves!"

"No, I don't owe you the gloves, Mr. Strangways, it is you who owe them to me," she said.

"I backed that one in pink and white, not that horror in black and yellow!"

"Oh, Miss Eva!" he remonstrated; "and you marked Rococo on your list!"

"It was a mistake," said Eva with a shrill laugh.

Had she followed her inclination she would have pouted and perhaps cried, for she had lost the gold chain which Hubert had wagered against her gloves and which he intended to give her under the name and style of "Rococo's apology." She did not know this and was consequently inconsolable in her own way.

"But look! see here!" said the young fellow, clumsily insisting on his rights and the truth. "Here is your own mark against Rococo."

He showed her his list with her big broken-backed E. set against the name of the beaten horse.

"You wrote it yourself," she said. "I am not going to pay you those gloves. I won the bet!"

"Well! you shall win the bet; but pay me the gloves all the same!" said Hubert.

"That would be only fair," put in Sir James, who had been listening to the conversation with a kind of joint-stock feeling in the affair.

If not himself, it was his friend and compatriot who was engrossing the attention of this little queen of many hearts; and that was the next thing to his own personal innings.

"No, that would say that I was in the wrong,"

replied Eva with mock gravity. "If I am right, as I am, I ought not to pay."

"That is cruel," cried Hubert with strange warmth, seeing that it was a mere joke which was being carried on. "I had counted on those gloves!"

At this moment Bois-Duval came back from his final settling behind the stand; and as the balance of the day had been against him, he too came back by no means in a good humour, but irritably ready to catch at straws and make lakes out of puddles. The whole quartet was in decidedly 'bad form,' and it was evident that a very little would bring about an explosion unless some kind of diversion were effected.

"What is it?" he asked in a politely disagreeable way, as he came up to the group and saw how Eva's wild-flower face was flushed and, for all her bird-like laugh, how dark and angry were her eyes, how ardent and eager was Hubert Strangways, and how earnest and animated Sir James. "What is it?" he asked again, scanning them all as at once an inquisitor and a judge.

"Oh, nothing! only a little private business of our own with Miss Ea," said Sir James haughtily.

"Mademoiselle with secrets? with private business of her own?" said Bois-Duval lifting his eyebrows and speaking in a strange rasping kind of voice

Eva looked suddenly frightened. She turned her face to him, but she did not look at him. She only turned to him as if complaining and appealing.

"Mr. Strangways said I backed Rococo and I did not—I betted against him," she said. "He lost and I did not."

Hubert was not eager now. The boyish glow that had come into his face during his discussion with Eva had deepened into an angry man's flaming wrath. It stung him as much as a direct insult would have done, that this man should be taken into confidence at all—made free of the little comedy that had been played by them. What business was it of his to interfere? and where did he get the right to ask what was on hand between him and Eva Winstanley? Surely her own fellow-countrymen stood nearer to her than did this foreigner! "It was cursed cheek," he said to himself in modern parlance, cheek that had to be stopped and punished.

"Do not be disturbed, mademoiselle," then said Bois-Duval in the most insufferable manner of insolent protection. Turning to Hubert he added: "Monsieur need not be alarmed. *I* pay all mademoiselle's losses to-day. What is it? a pipe? a pair of gloves? how much?"

He took out his betting-book to inscribe the debt among his graver transactions, looking up as he paused for details before writing. Hubert laid his large hand a little roughly on the book.

"Shut up," he said angrily. "Do you want me to pitch you and your book off the stand?"

"I would rather that monsieur remembered he was in the presence of ladies, and that he himself is a gentleman—that is if he can;—at all events, that he is dealing with a gentleman," said Bois-Duval slowly.

"We will discuss this matter by ourselves, M. le Vicomte," said Sir James, whose face was as white as Hubert's was inflamed.

"At your own time and pleasure," replied the Vicomte.

Without speaking, Hubert laid his hand on the Frenchman's arm. Grasping it like a vice he almost lifted him from the stand and led, or rather dragged, him to the space behind. It was done so quickly that the two were gone before the others had quite seen what was happening.

"What is it? what does he want?" cried Mrs. Winstanley in some agitation.

She had seen that something was amiss, but she had not understood it all.

"It is nothing," said Sir James. "They have their accounts to settle, that is all."

"There is more than that," said Thomasina rising; but before she had finished the last word Sir James too had disappeared. "Now see what you have done, Eva, with your abominable coquetry and disgraceful flirting," said Thomasina in a low voice to her frightened sister. "Those men will

have a duel; one of them will be killed; and you will be the cause of it!"

She said this just as Hubert, standing face to face with Bois-Duval, was saying in the low voice of concentrated anger: "Monsieur le Vicomte de Bois-Duval, you are an insolent cad!" at the same time striking him full in the face. "Name your time and place," he added; "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

Bois-Duval smiled as he recovered himself from the blow. It was a smile that was more ghastly than a frown.

"Monsieur has insulted me," he said; "and a Frenchman never forgives an insult. I shall be happy to meet monsieur—and to kill him."

"You should have left that to me, Hubert," said Sir James who came up a moment too late. "This was my affair, not yours."

"No, it was mine more than yours," said Hubert excitedly. "You love her and may marry her. My life is worthless!"

CHAPTER III.

LAUREL OR CYPRESS?

It was like a dissolving-view. The frame and the uprights remained, but the picture had disappeared and a dead grey wash was in place of the former brilliancy and colour. The sands and the sea, the

'fine fleur' of the aristocracy and the staid back-bone of the bourgeoisie, the rampant queens of the demi-monde, the casino, the baths and the 'little horses'—all were the same as before; but Trouville was now as sterile as the shores of the Dead Sea to the Winstanleys; and the mother had but one desire—to escape as soon as possible from its expensive disappointment and go home to economy and the mending of her nets.

It was on the day after the races that this sudden dissolution of the picture took place, when the two Frenchmen and the two Englishmen—the former of whom had been the especial friends, and the latter the strongest hopes, of 'les belles Anglaises,' departed together, leaving no address on their cards of adieu.

"I am sure something is wrong, Thomasina," said Mr. Winstanley again and again. "What can it be?—what do you think?"

Thomasina's thoughts were clear enough, but of what good to give them? If it would have been of real use to tell her mother that something undesirable was going on between Eva and Bois-Duval, she would have done so; but it was just that use which was problematical. She had no solid proof to offer; only conviction built up on airy nothings and suggestive trifles. And however strong such unsubstantial conviction may be to the one who entertains it, it is impossible to be passed on to another. She knew her mother too

both in her strength and in her weakness—how the one quality was shown in her determination not to be overcome in this hard battle of life waged with such insufficient weapons—how the other came out in her habit of prophesying smooth things when rough ones were about, and shutting her eyes to disagreeable truths unless absolutely compelled to open them. How could she take the news that Eva was doing her best to ruin both her own chances and the careful calculations of maternal prudence? Would she believe her, Thomasina, without more proof than there was to offer?—and, heavily handicapped as she was, half-strangled by that Black Care ever sitting behind her, was it well to add to her burdens?—to give an extra grip to the demon already in such cruel possession? Thomasina thought not. It was her bounden duty to spare her mother and, if she could, to manage Eva unassisted. At all events she would try. She would keep her knowledge to herself and do her best to make her mother's path smoother, not more thorny.

"What can I say, dear mother?" she asked after a pause. "It's odd, their all going away together; but who can account for young men's fancies?"

"Do you think there has been any quarrel?" asked Mrs. Winstanley.

She might as well let the murder out! Her fear was too great to keep.

"I hope not," said her daughter quietly. "But, as I said, who can tell what young men will do? They are no more reasonable than so many monkeys."

"They all seemed very angry and uncomfortable yesterday," said Mrs. Winstanley. "I did not quite understand it all—it had something to do with Eva's bet with Hubert, but the Baron was talking to me and my attention was distracted. Still, I saw they were all disagreeable together, and I should not be surprised at anything. It would be awful if they were to fight; but I cannot say I should be astonished to hear of it," she repeated with the weak reiteration of perplexity.

Eva looked up with a white scared little face.

"Mumsey! don't say such dreadful things!" she said almost in tears. "Why should they fight! What an awful idea! It is too dreadfully awful, really!"

Her round red under-lip quivered, and tears gathered into her blue eyes as she stooped and pretended to work down an imaginary discomfort in her dainty little shoe.

"My dear Eva, do not look like that!" said Mrs. Winstanley, whose main endeavour was, as we know, to preserve the serenity of her little Benjamin and the bloom of the prize rosebud intact. "There is nothing to go into hysterics for! I was perhaps rash to speak as I did; but really

you need not take my words to heart as if you were Perdita, poor child!"

"A little fear is good for girls, mother," drawled Thomasina; "it teaches them prudence."

Eva's face lost its look of scare and dread and became what the French call mutinous.

"I don't see why you should say that to me, Ina!" she said, putting up her head like a white mouse or a tomtit showing fight.

Thomasina looked at her over the top of a Japanese hand-screen with which she was playing; and Eva caught her eyes. She crimsoned to her temples and trembled all over. This look told her that her sister had seen through her and that she knew what was going on. How much did she know? and would she betray her?

"My dear Eva, do not take things in that brusque way," put in Mrs. Winstanley gently; "your sister Thomasina had no personal motive in what she said; and her principle was eminently correct. Girls cannot be too careful of their conduct, more especially girls like yourselves, without a father or brother to protect you, in a strange country and by no means ordinary-looking. Foreigners are too ready as it is to speak against English girls because of the greater liberty allowed them; and I must say I do not think that as a nation we are careful enough not to shock the prejudices of the country where we may be. We only get misjudged for our own parts."

"That is what I am always saying, mother, but Eva is really too heedless!" said Thomasina. "She will act as if she were a child, when she is out now and no more a child than any other girl who is introduced; and if she does not mind she will be getting herself and all of us into some awful scrape some day."

"My dear Thomasina, is not your judgment a little too severe?" said the mother with a deprecating manner, not liking to hear her youngest blamed but not willing to contravene anything that her eldest might think it well to say.

"Ina!" began Eva angrily.

"Now don't speak, Eva," interposed her sister. "You know quite well that you are very heedless, very giddy, and that I am always giving you advice and warning you to be more steady; and that you do not attend as you ought to what I say to you. You never take my advice, and always pretend that I am old-maidish and ridiculous and making a fuss about nothing."

"You cannot do better than follow your sister's counsel implicitly, my dear Eva," said Mrs. Winstanley. "She has excellent judgment. If I, who am so much older and more experienced, find her such a valuable assistance, what must she not be to you, my child?"

"Oh, yes, I know that Ina is ever so much older than I am," said Eva saucily. "She was a full-grown woman when I was a little tiny tot,

and of course she has had years and years more experience; but that is no reason why she should be always scolding me as she does."

"Eva! when do I scold you? Good advice is not scolding," remonstrated Thomasina.

"My dear! Thomasina is incapable of scolding, as you call it," said her mother. "As she says, advice is not scolding; the one is admissible from the best-bred person in the world, the other is a rude and vulgar habit fit only for the second class and servants."

"Mumsey, you do not see," said Eva; "and you do not hear."

"Now, Eva, do not talk any more nonsense. Come with me; I want to alter your fichu," said Thomasina, suddenly rising and taking her sister's arm.

"I don't want to," said Eva childishly.

"My dear Eva! go with your sister like a good girl," said Mrs. Winstanley, who saw in Thomasina's manœuvre a desire to cut short a discussion which threatened to become a little more bitter than was allowed by the Winstanley code of manners; and who thanked her in her heart for the tact and determination which always knew when a dangerous moment was reached and how it should be dealt with. "When you have finished your little arrangements put on your things and we will go for our last bathe. I propose to leave to-morrow for home. I have had enough of this

place, and I suppose you have, too. So go, my love, and get your fichu arranged."

And Eva, yielding to the pressure put on her, went, ignorant of what she was going to hear but fully conscious that she was to hear something disagreeable, to say the least of it.

"Now, Eva," said Thomasina, when they were alone; "I know all about you, so do not begin to deny and tell stories. You are a very naughty, deceitful, inconsiderate little thing; and worse; and you have got yourself into a dreadful mess by your horrible flirting with these three men at once —with the Vicomte, of whom we know absolutely nothing, and who may be a vicomte or may be a hair dresser for what we can tell; with Hubert Strangways, though he is engaged to a girl we know and whom you pretend to like; and with Sir James Kearney, who is sensitive and jealous, and would not touch you with his little finger if he knew what you had been doing. If you had had a particle of common sense in you you would have cooled off to Hubert, and never have begun your silly practices with the Vicomte at all, but would have just kept yourself for Sir James, who evidently admires you. But you have no common sense. You are just a great baby, fond of flattery und sugar-plums; and I despair of your ever doing well in life."

"You had better despair of yourself," said Eva, with a naughty toss of her pretty fuzzy head.

"You are very wise, Miss Ina, and as correct and stiff as a ramrod; but you are twenty-three years old and are not married yet; and I don't think you need talk to me. If I am not married before I am twenty-three, then you may; but you had better look at home, and see what your wisdom has done for you before you lecture me on my folly!"

"You are a naughty girl—a bad, wilful, shocking little thing," said Thomasina angrily; "far worse than Perdita, because you are deceitful, and she is not. And if these men have gone to fight a duel, as I believe they have, all about your silly little face, and one of them is killed, it will be your fault. And if you like that idea I make you a present of it. I should not like to think that I had been the cause of any man's death by my own wicked vanity and silly love of admiration!"

"And you are a horrid, cross, jealous, selfish old wretch!" cried Eva, bursting into those tears which mean fear and anger, not grief; then suddenly slapping her sister's face.

It was an action that proved the strength of human nature over conventional restraint, and showed how others, besides Perdita, had undisciplined passions when the fitting moment came for their expression.

"You are very silly and very impertinent," said Thomasina, recovering her dignity and calm-

ness with an effort. It would never do for the two Misses Winstanley to have a slapping match together; and Eva was in a state of hysterical over-excitation that made her as capable of plunging into a battle-royal as if she had been Perdita herself. "I have a great mind to tell mother and have you punished," Thomasina continued quietly. "If I do not, it is only because I do not want to pain her, not because I care to spare you. Come here, you tiresome little thing, and let me fix this for you! You are a greater plague than even Perdita!" she added, taking up a length of muslin, which she put over her sister's shoulders, while Eva wiped her eyes and pouted and twisted her shoulders into unfittable positions—Thomasina remonstrating between whiles.

During this process of fitting and fixing Thomasina had naturally to press her hand against the bosom of Eva's dress. Something that was not cotton nor yet flesh gave under her hand and crackled.

"What is that paper inside your gown?" asked the elder sister, stopping suddenly in her work.

"Nothing," said Eva, putting up her hand.

"They are letters," cried Thomasina. "Give them to me."

"They are not; and I shan't," returned Eva.

The elder was the stronger of the two, and indignation, coupled with a certain horrible fear, gave her even greater strength than her own.

She held both the soft little hands in one of hers, and with the other tore open the front of the bodice, to the damage of half-a-dozen buttons and in spite of the writhings and twistings with which Eva sought to defend herself—in spite even of that last desperate effort at self-protection when the child bent her pretty head and fastened her small, sharp, white teeth in her sister's arm.

It was all in vain. Strength prevailed and authority conquered. Thomasina drew out from their hiding-place a packet of letters, addressed in a neat small foreign hand to "La belle Anglaise;" "La reine des fées;" "La trop chère ange de mes rêves;" "Ma bien aimée, Eva," in progressive warmth and familiarity.

She opened them, and rapidly read four love-letters from Bois-Duval, beginning with formal and respectful flattery and culminating in the free audacity of confessed passion.

"I knew that something of this kind was going on, but I did not expect to find anything so bad as this!" cried Thomasina indignantly. "How could you be so wicked, Eva? How could you be so bold and forward? Now I must tell mother all about it, and she must talk to you."

"No, Ina, no; you must not! You must not, dear, good, sweet Ina!" cried Eva, taking her sister's hand, and kissing it just below where she had made her cruel little teeth nearly meet in the fair flesh. "I will be good if you will not tell

mother. I will, indeed! I will put the letters in the fire; and if he sends any more I will return them. Besides, we are going home, and he does not know where we live," she said hurriedly.

Did she forget that she had given him their London address?

"I cannot trust you," said her sister sternly. "You are so incurably false, Eva. I do not think you can help being deceitful."

"I will be good; I will, Ina!" pleaded the child, caught in the trap as she was and writhing under the pain of her position.

"If I see you burn these letters, and if I see you write and post the letter that I will dictate, then I will believe you; but only then," said Thomasina.

"I will, Ina; indeed, I will! And you may dictate what you like," sobbed Eva, who was ready to promise the Italian 'mountains and seas' so long as she might escape the dreaded exposure and be free of immediate punishment.

And on her word, and always with the feeling of sparing her mother, Thomasina let her off for this once and undertook to keep her secret. But she undertook also to keep her in view, and to make it almost physically impossible that there should be another such escapade as this which had brought their whole summer into disrepute, and changed its pleasures into perils of a grave and disastrous kind. She was shocked at the

whole thing and revolted by her sister's conduct on every side. A proud, pure-minded girl by nature—with a frozen temperament and the dignity characteristic of those women who claim homage because of their sex, and who think that they honour men when they permit their worship—she was outraged by this ready capitulation of her young sister, this grisette-like acceptance of familiarity, this self-debasement of a vulgar intrigue. That they had to marry, and marry money because of their birth and poverty, that she knew only too well; and she accepted the necessity as a cross laid on them by an unfriendly fortune. But an honourable marriage, made because of the fitness of things even without the pretence of romantic love, is a very different thing, she argued, from a secret and dishonourable flirtation of this kind. A bargain struck openly in the face of the world, where so much poundage of living flesh, so much grace and beauty and suavity and reasonable temper, are set against a fine house to live in and a fat banker's book to live on—that is a bargain which no wise mother disdains for her daughter, no girl of sense thinks a degrading sale of herself. Eva's was a very different affair, and must be checked at once; and with this determination Thomasina bade her wipe her eyes and bathe them in cold water so that her mother should not see she had been crying, reminding her again that she was under strict surveillance

from this day onward, and, in a sense, on her trial like a suspected person.

"And I will do as I like for all that; and you shall not see, though it is under your very eyes, you great, horrid thing," said little Eva to herself; while aloud she assured her dear Ina that she would be the very pink and pattern of propriety from henceforth and that she was sincerely penitent and ashamed of herself.

Meanwhile, the four young men had steamed away to Belgium, where they had their duel according to the strictest laws of honour and humanity. The result was a foregone conclusion from the first. Bois-Duval was a practised duellist with a nerve of iron and a heart of steel; Hubert had never been 'out' in his life, nor had he ever contemplated the possibility of such a chance in his own sober-blooded country. To the one it was, and would be, no more a matter of sorrow if he killed his man than it is to the sportsman when he knocks over a hare and hears it cry; to the other, now that his blood was a little cooled, it was a horror that he might kill, and not a very comfortable prospect if not a very terrible one, that he might he killed. He had the natural reluctance of strength and youth to die, though he said to himself that after all it did not much signify. He had got himself and his affairs into a frightful tangle, and he had not wit enough to see where he could untie the knots and lay the

confused threads smooth. Better then, cut them right through, and so have done with all at once —and yet the sun was bright and life was very good!

He stood before his adversary in the early light of this sweet summer morning; mechanically obeyed the directions given to him by his second; placed himself in position and waited for the signal; and when it was given, he fired with an unsteady aim, missed his man and fell to the ground dangerously, but just not mortally, wounded.

This was where a pair of blue eyes and an engagement thrust on him by his parents like a conjuror's forced card had led him;—this was the result of a flirtation that had been begun half in levity half in craft—half for mischief and half for gain, on the one side; if on the other, in pure, passionate, great-hearted and thick-headed devotion.

More than the mere wound made this duel an awkward episode in Hubert's life. When a young fellow has a father and mother and sisters and a fiancée, and is moreover heir to a fine estate, his actions become public property by just so many as are interested in his career; and a family is apt to think that it has certain rights over its several members, and that each of those members has a duty to the family. So that Hubert's present state and action entailed a de-

cided difficulty, in as much as both must be confessed and yet the true cause of the latter must be concealed.

It would not do to make it public that he had fought about a woman, Eva Winstanley or any other. It would not do to let it be thought that he had got into a race-course brawl—a shady gambling transaction; but outside these, what likely casus belli was there? Politics? No man in his senses would quarrel with a stranger on moot points of international history; and yet this was the only groundwork that could be given. A hot dispute on Waterloo and the *Vengeur*—yes, that was it! There was just so much colour in the fact as to redeem it from pure invention and blunt the points of those avenging prongs which prick for falsehood; and silly though it might be to fight a duel on such a matter, there was a dash and spirit and true British manliness and patriotism about it—a fine hardihood in chastizing that insufferable Gallic insolence—which touched old Mr. Strangways to the heart. So that he said to his wife with tears in his eyes, as he read Sir Kearney's letter:

"The lad is true blue, Ellen! English to the backbone, I am glad to say! I am proud of him."

But his mother wept and saw nothing to be proud of at all:—only a great deal to be very sorry for, to be agonized by, and to live in daily dread and discomfort on account of, until she had

nursed her darling back to life and strength in the hotel where Sir James had carried him after he had been struck.

"I told you what you were doing," said Thomasina to her sister as severely as if she had been Minos judging for eternity. "If Hubert Strangways dies you have been his murderer."

"I don't see that," said Eva defiantly. "It was not my fault if he chose to quarrel with M. le Vicomte. I did not tell him to!"

"I will take care that nothing of the kind happens again," said Thomasina; and Eva looked into her trunk demurely and said nothing in reply.

They were packing for their journey back to the land of fogs and Sabbatarianism, where at least the elder sister believed they should be safe from such complications as arise from secret letters addressed to "ma bien-aimée," by a handsome young man of unknown antecedents and unverified conduct. But she did not know that Eva had already given Bois-Duval their London address, and that he had promised to call when he went over in the autumn.

And all this time Hubert was lying between life and death in that brisk hotel on the Belgian frontier, with the question still undecided:—was he to wear the laurel as the brave champion of his country's honour, or must his family plant the cypress which should mark where his young life lay quenched for ever in the grave?

It would not be for want of care if he fell through the meshes into that yawning gulf below; for his mother and Sir James, his sister and Maud Disney, were all so many hands and feet for the two sisters of charity who were the recognized nurses at his bed-side; and if six people, forbye a doctor, could not save the life of one, of what good was human care or skill?

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE OLD WAY.

HOME again and nothing done! On the contrary, a great deal had been undone and certain carefully potted blooms, so far from having advanced, had been put back and were perhaps altogether nipped and blighted.

When she reckoned up the losses and gains of that Trouville campaign, poor Mrs. Winstanley found herself forced to confess that the former outweighed the latter. They had spent a great deal of money—and all to what purpose?—to attract a French nobleman who had not declared himself and who had spoilt the game for every one else! For there seemed to be no chance now of Hubert breaking off his engagement with Maud Disney for the sake of Eva and her wild-flower

face. A man who is nursed through an illness by his mother and his fiancée is scarcely likely to escape from their hands into other keeping; Sir James would probably be too jealous of Bois-Duval to care to enter the lists with him on his own account; and Mr. Brocklebank would be sure to be disgusted with the whole affair. Perhaps he would be disgusted to the extent of grave displeasure; so that he would withdraw that large, hard and heavy but on the whole beneficent hand of his which gave good gifts and useful advantages, even if it did a little abrade the tender flesh while giving. The dead and wounded of her hopes came to a formidable number when fairly calculated; and Mrs. Winstanley knew what it was to lament her slain, though she could not yet give them final burial.

The great thing that she kept to herself was: how much she knew. Not Thomasina herself guessed this riddle; and what was not revealed to her we may be very sure was dark as night to every one else. Even Eva, who had the penetration of guilty fear to help her, could not see through the mask of unruffled placidity which it was in the mother's rôle to wear; and the outside world was completely baffled.

The duel, which had got into the papers, was naturally the main topic of conversation and conjecture among all the friends common to the Winstanleys, the Strangways and the Kearneys;

and letters innumerable were written to Mrs. Winstanley inquiring how? why? and what? As the one of the group who had last seen the young men—and the only one who was acquainted with the Frenchman who had fought the duel—she was the well into which each dipped his or her sieve hoping to find Truth among the trickling waters. But Mrs. Winstanley was the soul of discretion and the angel of ignorance. She knew nothing. Voltaire's Huron could not have presented a blanker sheet than was the unsullied page of her unconsciousness. Certainly there had been a slight discussion in her presence among the young men on one or two historical facts; and she remembered in a vague way that Waterloo had been spoken of; but for her own part she had attached no kind of importance to the conversation, and they had all parted on quite amiable terms. It was a very ordinary little discussion. Perhaps the Englishmen did get just the least in the world in earnest—by no means angry—only a little heated; as young men will do when discussing politics. But it was no more than this; and she had thought nothing of it at the time or after. What serious disputation there had been, to lead to this most melancholy result, must have been after; and when she was not present.

This was all she had to say; and this was what she did say to each inquirer in turn. And by her candour, her want of suspicion and her charming

womanly ignorance of evil, she convinced all who questioned her that the thing must have been as Sir James had given out—a sudden quarrel between two hot-headed young braves of different nationalities, each anxious for the honour of his country and each trying which should crow the loudest.

So the conventional nine days passed and the wonder diminished as the time increased. The two girls followed their mother's lead and took her cue; and not the most skilful dredging brought up anything to reward investigation or to pay for the trouble of casting.

Perdita of course was out of the whole affair; and it was very certain that no one would seek to bring her into it. She was told nothing about it; not given even the trimmings and parings of the story; and thus could make no mischief as else she would have surely done, had she been trusted with a delicate little subterfuge to negotiate or a bolder lie to pass off as truth. Her eyes alone would have betrayed everything, and her silence would have been as eloquent as speech. No, certainly Perdita was not to be let behind the scenes, where even the mother stood veiled and Thomasina respected her disguise.

Moreover, Mrs. Winstanley had returned even less than before in sympathy with her rebel. Those two months' sojourn at Trouville had added the savour of French convenance to the older form of English Grundyism; and Perdita's independent pass-

age to and from the office seemed to her mother something more shocking and disgraceful than she had realized prior to that page of French experience. After having had to be so careful in her conduct at Trouville, she said to her eldest daughter —so vigilant, so watchful, on account of what the French might think—it was almost more than she could bear to have Perdita wandering about the streets as independently as if she were a man; and if she consulted her own inclination and sense of right she would put a stop to it without delay.

To which Thomasina answered: Yes; it was extremely unpleasant and annoying; but perhaps Perdita was less embarrassing now when out of the way and with something to do, than she had been when more in the house and always turning up at wrong moments—as on that dreadful afternoon when she had shocked Lady Kearney so fearfully. And then her money would come in usefully; would it not? and she had been very good and careful in their absence, and had lived on far less than one would have thought possible; had she not? and did not mother think her wonderfully improved? She herself, Thomasina, saw a great change for the better in her; and really she had grown almost pretty and very nearly lady-like!

"She owes you a great deal of gratitude for your persistent advocacy," said Mrs. Winstanley

with her gracious smile. "You inherit one of the beatitudes, Thomasina—that of peacemaker."

Though she still went on with her work in the Post-office Savings Bank, Perdita's essential freedom was, if not quite at an end, yet undeniably curtailed by the return of her family. She had no longer the key of the fields at her girdle; and Bell Blount and Mrs. Crawford were removed from the foreground to the middle distance in her social landscape. Her hours were marked, and she had to be at home more punctually than when she and poor old Cluff had eaten their herrings at all odd times together, and made believe to find them as toothsome as nutritious. Hence there were only rapid rests of two or three minutes—no more peaceful anchorages of one or may be two hours' length—in those quiet rooms above the shop where she always heard words of good counsel, and which she left with the feeling of having been spiritually washed and cleansed—perhaps a little overwatered, but undoubtedly washed and cleansed! There were no more doubtful evenings spent in the untidy bosom of that uncomfortable little household in Prince Christian's Road; where Bell Blount, with Connie Tracy as her 'wife,' Miss Long as her lady-help, the Emancipation of Woman as her occupation, and the conversion of Perdita Winstanley from a hero-worshipper into a man-hater as her hope, found the world good and life sweet. She had found it bitter enough at her married

home down there in the quiet country, with her good-hearted but not brilliant husband and her two pretty but not intellectual daughters—her companions and her treasures as some would have said—the millstones round her neck and the fetters on her feet as she herself held them to be! Doing her unexciting little duties to the poor of her husband's parish was sorry work for one whose special glory and delight lay on the platform, and who would open all careers, without exception, to women as to men; but smoking cigarettes, drinking bitter beer for breakfast and B. and S. at all hours of the day, acting like a man and forgetting that she was a woman—that was an existence worth having, and to make others like herself an object worth pursuing!

What danger lay for Perdita, however, in the bold mind and anarchical ideas of this petticoated bachelor, was lessened now by a large amount, so far as frequency of association went; and her intercourse with Bell became, like that with Mrs. Crawford, a fearful kind of joy to be snatched only at peril and in hot haste. She saw both at intervals truly, and her mind was still their shuttlecock, ever tossed between the two alternatives—the freedom which was so seductive and the duty which was so ennobling; the emancipation which appealed to her ambition, her pride, her energy, her democratic desires, and the home which fulfilled the love, the devotion, the power of self-

sacrifice and all the best instinct of her womanhood. As a further element of indecision and mental vacillation she loved Mrs. Crawford personally, although her teaching, intellectually cold and dogmatically cramped as it was, often chafed her; and personally Bell Blount was antipathetic, though the main current of her social philosophy attracted her as the sense of space and freedom ever does attract the young, the ardent and the generous. But unlike as they were, either was more sympathetic to her than her mother and sisters; and both households were more pleasing, each in its own way, than that odd jumble of insufficiency and show, of prettiness and penury, which made her own home; for both were real in all that they appeared to be, and this last was a sham.

Between herself and her people the battle had begun again for poor Perdita, and on just the old grounds. Though improved in appearance and less of a Zulu than before, she was still not up to the mark according to the Winstanley standard; and the smoother manner which had come chiefly from the absence of reproach and consequent self-consciousness, lost itself again in the abrupt, ungainly, uncomfortable shyness which was at once the cause and result of perpetual rebuke and ridicule. Moreover, she was no wiser than she had been before. The wisdom of reticence and toleration comes but very slowly to a nature which errs by excess of conscientiousness and moral courage; and Perdita

was, if anything, even more democratic, more sincere, more convinced of the sacred value of elemental principles and the wickedness of compromise for the sake of existing interests than she had been before. 'Fiat justitia!'—that was her motto as it was Bell Blount's. Let the universe crack if it will, but let Eternal Justice rule without the loss of a thread in her garment, no matter who may go bare! Thus the old battle broke out again between her and hers, as has been said, on exactly the same lines as before; and the old unhappiness, the old sad feeling of domestic ostracism, began to creep over her like a blight and to manifest itself in her looks and manner.

Naturally her new friends had their nostrums.

"Leave your people and come with us. You are base and cowardly to submit."

This was Bell Blount's advice, urged with all the strength of her will and the power of her words.

"Submit patiently to your mother's will; whether you like it or not, submit," said Mrs. Crawford. "Never forget that she is your mother, and that obedience to parents is a commandment given by God."

Leslie, in whom the Quaker blood was not so strong and the Quaker quietism a good deal modified, demurred to this extreme doctrine of filial submission almost as much as he demurred to Bell Blount's masculine independence. He said:

"No; you have your own life to lead, your own nature to perfect, and you may carry submission and self-repression too far. Atrophy is not health and paralysis it not repose. Keep clear of the unsexed exaggerations of your woman's rights friends, but remember also that you are an account. able being, and that no one virtue is the whole duty of man. More goes to form the catalogue of perfection than even submission to parents."

And this form of the golden mean seemed to Perdita the wisest and best of all the doctrines propounded. She was not much of a temporizer certainly; but if Leslie Crawford thought half measures the best, she was sure he must be right. At all events, she did what she could to follow his advice, and once or twice did actually hold her tongue when the 'common people' were spoken of disdainfully; when Eva asked her if they had an uniform like soldiers, or wore blue things like butchers in her office? when her mother and Thomasina, rising out of the ordinary region of fashion and social engagements, said they hoped all the Russian Nihilists would be killed and that the French Republic would be overthrown by either an Orleanist, an Imperialist, or a Legitimist: it did not signify which of the three, so long as Gambetta was humiliated and the Republic was overthrown. She knew that these were rags flourished in her face; and if at times she gave in to the lure and raved as she was wont to do, at other times, and not

infrequently, she quietly left the room on some pretext, or buried her head in her book and persistently would not hear. This latter plan, however, was not very successful, for she could not make herself deaf for very long; and when she pricked up her ears to open her mouth, then there was a skirmish wherein she was sure to go wrong and to be severely punished.

One day, when she went to Mrs. Crawford's house for one of those rapid little visits which were her brief stages of refreshments in her dreary life, she found the child slightly indisposed. There was no cause for grave alarm, yet Mrs. Crawford was in a state of nervous depression such as Perdita had never seen her in before. Her manner to her 'young friend,' as she was wont to call Perdita, was shaded with something that looked almost like embarrassment, unless it were displeasure. And that it could scarcely be! She spoke, for Mrs. Crawford, a little abruptly, and did not look into the good, honest, freckled face with the same steady, half-mournful, half-observing gaze which was so essentially 'her way'. She wandered in an aimless kind of manner about the room and looked restless and disquieted; almost as if the girl's visit were unwelcome; and yet how often she had said: "Come whenever you will; you are always welcome and I shall rejoice to be of good to you."

Altogether the trifling ailment of a little child

worrying over its teeth seemed scarcely cause enough to account for the decided discomfort of a woman generally so quiet and still, so much herself and so unruffled as Mrs. Crawford.

Leslie was not upstairs when Perdita came in, so that she was alone with Mrs. Crawford, when she heard the news of little Lily's indisposition and marked the disquiet of the grandmother.

"I hope she will soon get better, poor darling!" said Perdita, full of hearty sympathy.

Going up to Mrs. Crawford and kneeling down by her as she was wont to do, she took the soft cool hand in her nervous feverish fingers and held it warmly clasped.

"Yes, I hope so," said Mrs. Crawford, but not speaking as if little Lily's health were really the pivot and centre of her thoughts, as she had given Perdita cause to think.

"You must not fret; you will make yourself ill if you do," continued Perdita. "Children are so soon ill and well again!" she added sagely.

"It is the Lord's will," said Mrs. Crawford with a sudden rush of tears. "I never fret, my dear; but some things are hard to bear," she said, her thin lips quivering.

"Yes," said the girl.

She knew—who better?—that some things are hard to bear; but these were not the burdens in her friend's present wallet of woe; and again it struck her that things were a little confused here

to-day, and that Lily's slight attack did not explain eyerything; or else, it was no slight attack at all, but on the contrary a dangerous malady the true nature of which was concealed.

Presently Leslie came into the room. Something had evidently also passed over him. He was wonderfully sweet and courteous to his mother; and Perdita thought him also kinder and more expansive to herself than he was in general. For the most part he made her feel that he liked her, but he said nothing that carried an echo, did nothing that left an impress. It was more a sentiment, an atmosphere, than a fact; but to-day that sentiment was more visible, that atmosphere less subtle. There was something in the whole interview that interested her beyond herself, so that she stayed a longer time than usual—and stayed far into the dusk. She could not tear herself away. It was in her nature to try and brighten up Mrs. Crawford, if indeed she might; and to help in the quiet comfort given by Leslie's kindness. He was so good, so noble! she said to herself in self-explanation and excuse. She liked him so much!—and she felt that he did her good when he talked to her so kindly, discussed such and such question with her as no one else did, and took so much interest in her mental life, in her thoughts and views. And not even Mr. Brocklebank did that really; though sometimes, to please her, he would pretend that he did. However, staying into the dusk as

she did, Leslie said that he would walk home with her. He did not like her walking alone when the daylight had gone; and Perdita was not disposed to quarrel with his championship. She was glad that it was dark. It not only gave her the pleasure of his companionship but it hid her from the possible observation of her own people. She would not like her mother or Thomasina to meet her walking through High Street with Leslie Crawford the chemist. There was no harm in it; no kind of reason why she should be ashamed to accept and thus be induced to refuse her friend's escort. He was her friend and a high-minded well-read gentleman. He was a chemist certainly; but what of that? Are we not all brothers and sisters by the great law of human fraternity? What was there to which to object in her action?

Nevertheless she felt that she was doing something wrong insomuch as it was secret. She knew that she would not go in open-mouthed to her mother and say: "Mother, my friend Leslie Crawford, the chemist, walked home with me."

She ought to do so if she would act up to her own principles; she knew that very well; but she knew also that she would not. For if she did she would be forbidden to go to the house again; and she did not feel as if she *could* give up the companionship of that sweet dear woman who was more like a mother to her than her own.

As they were walking along, somehow—Per-

dita did not know how—the conversation drifted on to the subject of mésalliances.

"The only real mésalliance is that where there is want of moral and intellectual equality." said Leslie. "When two people are on the same platform in refinement and education, and when their ideas as to what are the best things in life agree, there is no mésalliance. A duchess counting money as her chief good, and a chimney-sweep millionaire counting aristocratic recognition of his wealth as his, are fitly matched, though she had thirty-two quarterings and he once climbed the flues. And on the other hand, a lady of good birth who looks for higher things than mere conventionalities, makes no mésalliance if she marries—what shall I say? —a shopkeeper let us suppose, equal to herself in all but the arbitrary rulings of society. The worst mésalliance of all is to mate frivolity with earnestness; love with indifference. All the rest is child's play compared to this."

"Yes," said Perdita in a low voice.

"Are you ambitious in your views of life?" asked Leslie with odd abruptness.

"In some things perhaps; not in mere station," she answered.

"Would you marry what is called beneath yourself, for instance, if the man personally was all right and it was only the conventional station that was askew?"

Leslie spoke in a studiously careless voice,

looking up at that electric light as he passed it.

"Yes," answered Perdita tremulously.

"You would care for the man and not for his grandfather? But the families cares so much for the grandfather! If Milton himself had kept a shop, I question if the Marchioness of Carabas would have shaken hands with him over the counter. Do you think she would?"

"I do not know. I am not the Marchioness of Carabas," said Perdita simply.

"There are always the colonies if things get too uncomfortable at home," continued Leslie. "Would you go to the colonies with the man you loved?"

He looked at her from under the brim of his soft felt hat, and she saw his eyes glisten even in the darkness.

"I would go into the desert!" she answered in her passionate wholesale way. The colonies made but a tame simile! Nothing short of the desert with its drought and solitude, its perils and wild beasts, to express the possible devotion of that devoted enthusiastic heart!

"Take my arm," said Leslie suddenly. "This crossing is bad and you are short-sighted."

He took her hand, and himself laid it on his arm where he held it for just a moment before he took his hand away.

"You are a brave beautiful girl!" he said warmly. "God bless you!" Then after a pause

he added with strange coldness and restraint: "You deserve a good husband, Miss Winstanley. I hope when you do marry, it will be one worthy of your love."

"I never shall marry," said Perdita tears choking her voice she scarcely knew why. Really life was a very dreary affair and Heraclitus was a true prophet! It was so much easier to weep than to laugh; yet a moment ago she would have said the contrary.

"Yes, yes, you will," he answered with forced cheerfulness. "And you will make me chemist in ordinary to your household."

"Don't, Mr. Crawford!" cried Perdita in a pained voice.

They were close now at her own door. The lamplight fell on her face but left her in the shadow.

"But you must not shut your eyes to the fact that I am only a chemist, a shopkeeper selling my goods over the counter," he said. "One whom your own people would say was no fit friend for you, a lady by birth and family association as you are all through."

"You are a better man than I am a woman; you are too good for me—for the friendship of such a foolish ungoverned thing as I am!" said Perdita hastily. "Your friendship honours me, not mine you; and I do not care if you were

twenty times a chemist, I should still always respect and like you!"

A light came into his eyes, a smile broke round his lips, as suddenly he took both her hands in his and drew them up to his breast

"Married or single," he said with tenderness so intense as to be pathos, reverence so deep as to be love; "you may always count on me as your faithful, firm, unchanging friend. I understand something of your heart and nature, and the more I understand the more I love and respect you. God bless you—dear!"

Out in the street as it was—before the very door of her own house—the lamplight from that aristocratic if impecunious dwelling falling full on her flushed face—the man before her neither of her own station nor yet a declared lover—Perdita bent her head and kissed the ungloved hand that held her own.

"And God bless you!" she said, lifting her large eyes to his.

Then she ran up the steps with haste, her blood on fire with shame and confusion at what she had done. And yet she could not feel sorry nor wish it undone. He was only a chemist, truly; but he had once saved her life; he had tried to make it nobler; and now he had made it blessed!

But poor Mrs. Winstanley! How she was to be pitied! Here was she scheming schemes and weaving spells;—and of her three daughters—

Thomasina was out in the cold, no man's confessed choice; Perdita was looking into the face of a chemist and druggist with eyes which overflowed with love; and Eva was watching for the post, in fear lest the letter daily expected from her French vicomte should fall into other hands than her own, and the whole intrigue be blown into space before its time!

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT MOGUL.

BENJAMIN BROCKLEBANK did not, as a rule, implicitly believe in women; still less did he trust in men. He thought mankind in general found falsehood a vast deal easier than truth; and that the one came by nature while the other had to be learnt by grace. But he would have scorned to doubt the word of a lady of a certain social standing, and he made trust part of the law of courtesy. If Mrs. Winstanley, for instance, said that such a thing was or was not, he would take her word for it though the whole weight of evidence went against her; he would even have been inclined to make it a personal question had any one thought differently and maintained that smoke meant fire and that when linen was wet it had been in the water, if that handsome Juno of No. 100 declared the contrary.

Of course he, like the rest of the world, heard of the duel between Hubert Strangways and a French nobleman; and he, like the rest, applied to Mrs. Winstanley for her version. And when he had it, he accepted it as incontrovertible, and said so to his sister to whom he showed the letter.

"A very satisfactory explanation, my dear Clarissa," he said triumphantly. "I am glad our fair friends were out of it. I feared they might have been implicated, seeing that this young gentleman is a friend of theirs."

Mrs. Merton, who, unknown to her brother, kept up an active correspondence with his bug-bear, Sir James, echoed his sentiments, his triumph and his convictions; accepted Mrs. Winstanley's version as the truth; ran up a pretty little symphonic scale as an accompaniment to his condemnation of the young fellow's rashness for quarrelling with a Frenchman at all, intermingled with commendation of his patriotism in taking up the cudgels for his own country; and made herself all through the soothing, flattering, sisterly echo which was both her pleasure and her role. But she had an odd trick of looking straight down her small blunt nose when she did thus echo her brother; and in the faintest way possible would pinch up her nice round mouth, and be very earnest about the proper adjustment of her sleeves and cuffs. For Sir James, who had made her his confidante from the first days of their friendship, had shown her just

so much of the cat so snugly fastened in the bag as could be seen in this one phrase: "And the brute had forced himself most insolently on the Winstanleys, and had taken quite an insufferable tone of familiarity with them."

This was not showing much, but it was enough for an acute social osteologist, as Mrs. Merton was in her own way. Out of this one bone the fair soft-voiced widow made out the complete anatomy of the creature—from this one brick constructed the whole temple; and neither creature nor temple was much out of the straight line when she had done. But as she was far from wishing to make mischief between her brother and the Winstanleys—as she rejoiced in the fact that it had been Hubert and not Sir James—and as she could not very well say whence or how she had got her better information—she carefully hid her bone, locked away her brick in the secret recesses of her heart, stopped up the chink through which the light had come; and in the sweetest way possible looked down her short blunt nose, pinched up her nice round mouth, and agreed with her brother to accept the theory of political impersonality contained in Mr. Winstanley's natural and innocent version.

And now all things went spinning in the old way down the old grooves just as if there had been no break at all:—no Trouville sands with Bois-Duval here; no chemist's shop with Leslie

Crawford there; no wounded lad laying in that inn on the Belgian frontier; no grave and sorrowful friend learning at last the truth through the ravings of fever, and pondering over the knowledge. The dropped threads were taken up with the most delicate precision, wherever it was possible; and the game began again just where it had left off.

When the Winstanley family came back from their disappointing campaign and took up their residence again at 100 West Hill Gardens, Mrs. Merton came back to her luxurious home, and her brother Benjamin ran up to town from Armour Court to resume that place of family guardian and moral investigator which late events had interrupted. He himself would have gone over to Trouville during the time of his fair friends' stay there—how thankful they all were that he had not!—if he had not been compelled to make what he called an industrial excursion through Sweden and Denmark, part of Holland and a bit of Germany. He had to inspect some iron foundries of which he had heard alarmingly favourable reports; and he had to open new as well as retain old markets for his own pigs. For, rich as he was, his soul was in his business as a hunter's is in his game; and he enjoyed cutting out a rival and extending his own lines over foreign territory, just as much as if the pounds accruing were of consequence to his pocket and his funded property wanted feeding. Now however, with the passing

of the summer came the re-establishment of old home relations; and the Winstanleys were the first of the knots which he tied in his social quipos.

The three ladies were sitting in the drawing-room in the dark, waiting for the servant to light the gas before dinner. This was an operation which Mrs. Winstanley never hurried. So long as she could keep the girls quiet and amused, she saved so much in the quarter; and she was wise enough not to despise fractions in housekeeping. Perdita had not yet come home. At this moment indeed, she was walking up High Street on Leslie Crawford's arm. By only a minute did the rich ironmaster pass the chemist's shop before she came out of the private door. It was one of those providential interpositions which help the imprudent young; but as Perdita did not know the danger from which she had been preserved, she could neither tremble at her peril nor thank the Great Power which had influenced the goings and comings of about half a hundred persons and carriages that she might be saved from a scolding which perhaps, all things considered, she deserved. And just as she and her friend were discussing that suggestive question of mésalliances and her own willingness to marry below herself in social status, Benjamin Brocklebank thundered at her mother's door.

"I hope I see Mrs. Winstanley and her charming family well! Glad to welcome them back to their native land," he said, his sonorous voice vibrating

through the room and echoing from the walls in such strength and volume as almost to hurt the ears of those who heard it.

It was really sweet, and almost touching, to see the pleasure—one might even call it well-disciplined emotion—with which graceful Mrs. Winstanley received her loud-voiced, broad-shouldered, hard-featured guest. There was something inexpressibly maternal in the smile that beamed on her well-preserved face as he entered with his noisy stamp and heavy tread, as if he had had four feet instead of two. Her delicately graduated accent, passing from the self-betraying caress of surprise to the conscious restraint of conventional propriety, was as eloquent as an embrace. Indeed her first impulse of welcome—both hands held out as if to take him to her handsome bosom—was essentially an embrace in spirit, and was the finest expression of womanly tenderness that Benjamin Brocklebank had ever received. She bore herself in these first sweet moments of pleasure and surprise as if some dear son had returned from foreign parts where there had been danger from wild beasts and the presence of savages and pirates—as if some wept-for Jonah had been unexpectedly cast up on the sands at her feet, when she had been thinking of nothing more exciting than starfish and sea-anemones. And if she was thus sympathetic, Thomasina and little Eva were equally charming; and the welcome from all three accorded to the

master of Armour Court made him feel as if every stubby hair of his close-cropped grizzled head had been smoothed the right way, and as if that mysterious organ, the cockles of his heart, had been well warmed with 'thirty-seven port.'

"How good of you to look us up so soon!" said Mrs. Winstanley with her best air of refined gratitude.

"How nice to see you again!" laughed little Eva, clapping her pink, plump hands together, as if that ponderous Benjamin had been a wax doll or a pantomime, a new trinket or a box of sugar-plums.

He turned to Thomasina for her contribution. Mrs. Winstanley's eldest daughter said nothing; but she raised her large clear eyes with a sweetly glorifying look and smiled her best smile as she turned them on him—two inarticulate poems setting forth his praise, wherein that smile was the dumb music.

Her silence touched the ironmaster quite as much as Mrs. Winstanley's matronly caress—the little rosebud's childish delight. It was like Miss Winstanley to be quiet and undemonstrative even where she felt most deeply; and silence is sometimes more eloquent than speech. The voice has the foolish trick of trembling when the heart beats fast; and emotion somehow damps down the smoother notes and only allows to escape those queer, rough, deepened sounds which betray so

much more than is desirable! Yes, Thomasina was right not to speak. Poor young lady! was she then so hard hit as this? She was a beautiful creature; but was she not looking a little thin after her Trouville trip? Her eyes were as lovely as ever; but surely, surely, the faintest little network of lines was beginning to engrave itself about the corners! Without question these two months had not improved her:—and where was Miss Perdita?

Where, indeed?

When he asked this question of Mrs. Winstanley he instantly saw that his protégée was, as he said, on the wrong side of the account.

"She is dreadfully late to-night," the mother answered tartly, in spite of her desire to be as sweet as honey all through. "I hope no accident has happened," she added, shading off her acidity into anxiety.

"Public officials are not always able to be punctual to the moment," said Mr. Brocklebank largely. "I imagine there has been press of work in the office, and Miss Perdita has had more than her usual allowance."

"It may be so," said Mrs. Winstanley with a restless glance round the room; "I hope it is only that."

"And I hope, too, that she will soon return," continued the ironmaster; "for I have come to make Mrs. Winstanley and her charming daughters a proposition. I wish to inaugurate this happy

reunion of friends with a fête appropriate to the occasion. I have already ordered a dinner at the Continental that I trust my fair friends will do me the honour to partake of; and after that I think we shall find a box at the—Theatre awaiting our occupancy. It is a large box; said to be capable of holding six. We are only five; so there is a place to spare for General Manners!"

On which the ironmaster laughed and the ladies dutifully joined in the chorus.

"It is most good of you, most kind! What can I say to such a delightful proposal?" said Mrs. Winstanley, looking at her daughters with a pleased air.

"How nice!" cried Eva, always the first to welcome pleasure.

"How very thoughtful and kind!" said Thomasina gently, her smile giving life to her words.

"I am glad that I have gratified Mrs. Winstanley and her charming young ladies," returned the ironmaster with a friendly chuckle: "it affords me so much pleasure to procure them enjoyment! And they accept my little friendship's offerings, my humble tributes so graciously, it is quite inspiriting! Now we only want Miss Perdita to make the whole thing complete. Ah! I do verily believe here she comes!" he added, as the sound of feet running up the steps and a nervous ring at the bell seemed to speak of haste and a bad conscience.

And sure enough they heard Perdita's voice in the hall saying to the servant:

"Is dinner ready? Have I kept any one waiting?"

Why they heard so distinctly was due to Mr. Brocklebank's lordly impatience and masterful assumption of domestic rights. For as soon as he heard the bell he strode to the drawing-room door and opened it, standing there to catch that naughty rebel on her way upstairs and, as he fondly hoped, make her as happy as he had just made the mother and sisters.

"Ah! come at last!" he said a little eagerly, as she ran hurriedly by. "And we fancying all sorts of uncomfortable disasters! Welcome home, Miss Perdita—we are all waiting for you! Come in! come in and hear the news!"

Her face pale with an emotion that was not pain and yet was scarcely pleasure—her large, soft, prominent eyes vague, humid, dreamy—her generous mouth a little parted as if to give the fast-coming breath a freer passage—her whole being touched with the living light of passion—Perdita came face to face with Mr. Brocklebank and with a little exclamation of honest joy laid her hand in his.

His heavy face brightened like a schoolboy's at a generous 'tip.' He took it all in—and took it all to himself. Not graceful like Thomasina; not beautiful like Eva; but how much more interesting than either! Greatly fascinated as he was pleased

to be with each of the other two, this shy-mannered, short-sighted, freckle-faced girl had somehow struck a deeper chord and called forth a richer harmony than any one had ever done before. The passion that was in her gave fire and heat to the dull slag of his heart; and though by the law of fitness he knew her to be nowhere in comparison with Thomasina, yet by that of personal sympathy which makes the unlike the supplement not the contrast, she was foremost of the three.

It was all for him! All the tenderness in her eyes, all the emotion on her face, the breath that came so heavily, the heart that throbbed so fast —it was all his own! He was master of her affections, as he was of Thomasina's; and it was in his own will only which he would choose, and when. But he thought he knew now which it would be.

"Miss Perdita has always a kind word for her friends," he said, holding her hand in his as he led her into the room and looking at her with an odd kind of affectionate mastership. "She makes them so agreeably welcome."

"I hope we all do that," said Mrs. Winstanley gracefully. Her face was very sweet, but her voice was slightly acrid. She would not oppose Perdita's chance; of course not; and she would consider it the most beneficent act of an overruling Providence should Mr. Brocklebank relieve her of this troublesome rebel of hers; but all the same she would feel disappointed and aggrieved for her dear

Thomasina; and while handing over the one, would have difficulty in refraining from injurious comparisons with the other and reproaches for the bad taste shown and the unworthy choice made.

"Yes," said Perdita heartily, but shyly too. "We are all glad to see you again, Mr. Brocklebank."

"Upon my soul I think so!" he answered. Then he laughed. "I think you know who are your friends!" he said, and looked at Mrs. Winstanley. "But now we have no time to lose," he continued. "I am going to take you all to dine with me at the Continental, Miss Perdita; and afterwards we go to the theatre to see— let me see, what is it?" He pulled a programme out of his pocket— "Oh! 'Love Laughs at Locksmiths: and 'When a Woman Wills she Wills,' and 'Between Two Fires.' A pleasant programme enough. I trust we shall find the acting in accordance with its promise. What do you say to that, Miss Perdita, eh?"

With clumsy familiarity he took both her hands and swung them to and fro.

Perdita looked at her mother. Was it intended that she should go with them? or was it wished that she should refuse?

Mrs. Winstanley, still sweet and acid in one, looked at her uncomfortable daughter with eyes as cold and hard as crystal and lips which graciously smiled.

"You especially delight in the theatre, do you not, Perdita, my child?" she said as a lead; and poor Perdita's sensitive face was on the instant one grateful palpitating blush.

"Yes, indeed, indeed I do!" she said warmly. "I like nothing so much!"

"Not even me?" asked the ironmaster with another swing of her hands.

She looked up at him affectionately.

"I don't think I would give you up for the theatre!" she said with a happy little laugh; and Mr. Brocklebank pressed her hand for this answer with such a vice-like grip that she slightly winced, for all her hardihood to pain.

"Now I must be peremptory," he said, releasing her and looking at his watch. "I can give my fair friends ten minutes for adornment. Not a second more! Who will be ready first, I wonder? Miss Perdita, I will wager my head!"

"Of course she will!" laughed Eva, as she slipped past the ironmaster balancing her arms with her favourite half-flying movement. "And I shall be last; you will see that I am!"

She really meant that, as Perdita made less account for her appearance than either she herself or Thomasina, she naturally took less time in her dressing: but Mr. Brocklebank, on the wrong scent throughout, thought that she had divined her sister's secret and meant that impatience for his society, and desire to win his approbation

for the minimum amount of feminine vanity, would hasten her movements and bring that sensitive impassioned delightful rebel first to the room —and alone.

In this belief he sat and hugged himself while the ladies tumbled over their wardrobes and quarrelled with their clothes, after the manner of women to whom good dressing is more important than all the Ten Commandments in a bunch, when they have to make themselves look nice without due preparation.

Watch in hand the ironmaster sat waiting for the return of the ladies to whom he was playing the Great Mogul; hoping and believing that his protégée would redeem his word and justify his prophecy. But something that she could not explain—a bashfulness more instinctive than confessed —kept Perdita upstairs even after she had dressed. Of course she was ready before her sisters, or even her mother. Her style was simpler; she had fewer addenda to put on after the main structure was complete; and she wasted no moments in critical examination of all four sides by means of a hand-glass and a couple of candles. Still, she did not go down to the drawing-room. On the contrary, she knocked a little timidly at Thomasina's door and went into her sister's chamber, partly to go down with her and partly for her verdict.

"Am I all right, Thomasina?" she asked, standing awkwardly at the door.

"Come nearer and then I can see you better," answered Thomasina with genuine kindness.

She saw how things were going, but she was neither jealous nor disappointed. For herself it was only poverty and her mother's debts which made her desire to be married at all, which made it possible that she should marry a man like Mr. Brocklebank whom personally she loathed and intellectually despised. Marriage was her sole possible profession; a husband her sole source of income; and in securing these where she could, though she might outrage her womanhood she only yielded to necessity. But if Mr. Brocklebank liked Perdita, and Perdita liked Mr. Brocklebank—à la bonheur! The game was safe, and she was spared the distasteful part of scoring it. She would not be so sorry for Perdita as she would be for herself, or for poor little Eva, should the choice fall on her. Perdita would not marry if she did not love; and that, Thomasina supposed with a tranquil kind of speculative wonder, made all the difference. Thus, she was neither jealous nor disappointed because the ironmaster with his millions in his pocket seemed to prefer Perdita to herself. Quite the contrary. For indeed outside the degradation of morals inseparable from this self-confessed intention of selling herself to the highest bidder, Thomasina was a girl without vices, free

from petty faults and capable of a reasonable stretch of virtue. Had she not been for sale she would have been as charming in character as she was beautiful in person; but that terrible standing in the market-place spoilt all!

"Yes, you look very nice, Perdita," she then said after she had examined her sister with those grave critical eyes. "But you want something in your hair, you look too plain, too little en grande tenue for the occasion. Here! you shall have this," she added, unfastening a flower which she had pinned into her own magnificent, bought and unpaid braid. "I will wear a piece of gold ribbon and this white rose will just suit your colour."

"No, no, I will not take this from you! If I want anything in my hair—but I don't think I do, Thomasina!—I will wear a piece of ribbon. I have some upstairs, and it is quite fresh. You shall not give me your pretty flower, dear!"

Perdita said this with warmth, effusion, gratitude, surprise, affection, reverence, all tumbled in a heap in her rash heart and eager voice.

"Don't be silly," said Thomasina in a cold voice; "I have my reasons for wishing you to look specially well to-night. I insist on it, Perdita; so please make no fuss."

"No, no, Thomasina, I cannot take it from you!" she said again.

"Sit down. I have no time to spare, and you

must do as I tell you. What a trouble you make about everything! How silly you are, Perdita! Sit down, I say, and let me put it in."

"I do not like to take it from you, Thomasina! You look so lovely with it yourself, and I am not used to things like this! I shall only look a fright, as I always do; and then the beauty of the flower will be lost. Do wear it yourself, Thomasina!" said the unlucky one, rebellious through unselfishness and tiresome because she was good.

Thomasina laid the flower on her dressing-table.

"Then please go out of my room and let me finish my dressing," she said with glacial dignity. "You really are too tiresome to be borne with."

"Don't be angry with me, Thomasina!" pleaded Perdita. "We have been such good friends since you came home, and you are the only one I can speak to!"

"It is impossible to keep good friends with you, Perdita," answered her sister, still glacial. "You are just maddening from first to last and I wash my hands of you. I wish you would go out of my room!" she added sharply.

"What a dreadfully unlucky girl I am!" said Perdita to herself as she turned away, the quick tears in her big eyes and her eager heart heavy and damp. "I should love Thomasina so much

if only she would let me—if she understood me a little better and did not so soon shut up against me! I never mean to offend her and she is often so kind to me; and then it all goes off in some unlucky fume like this! She and mother both want such tremendous obedience, and I cannot always bend to them—not at the first moment in little things like this—and never in the greater ones! But I won't vex Thomasina to-night. She is very sweet and good to want to make me look nice. I hate taking her things, but perhaps I ought. It is very detestable to me—but if she wishes it?"

These thoughts passed like lightning through her head in the brief moment of her passage to the door. Then she turned back, the big drops trembling on her long lashes.

"Dear Thomasina, it was only because I did not wish to deprive you of your pretty flower," she said humbly. "I did not want to vex you; and you shall put it in if you like."

"If you would only understand that obedience is far more proof of love than what you please to call unselfishness—but which is only selfishness in disguise—you would get on much better than you do," said Thomasina as tranquilly as if there had been no dispute between them. "You give more trouble than any one else, simply because you will not fall into the ordinary ways of other girls; and then you wonder that we do not like it. There!

you look far better with that rose in your hair; but now you want a necklet and bracelets. Here, take these of mine; and mind you don't lose them."

And Perdita, subdued to the proper pitch, meekly hung herself about with borrowed ornaments of mock jewellery—things which her soul abhorred—because Thomasina wished it, and the wish had touched her heart.

Then they both went down together; and because this little altercation and addition had taken up one or two of the precious minutes allowed, they were behind their time and the last of the group—of whom little Eva had been first.

Mr. Brocklebank's face was like a thundercloud. The watch was still in his hand, and he was standing like the impersonation of masculine punctuality with loins girded, ready to depart and hindered by unpardonable feminine frivolity.

"Miss Winstanley is late," he said, ignoring Perdita, with whom he was too displeased even to care to chastise. Excommunication is sometimes a more severe sentence than punishment.

"Yes, I am so sorry! It was all my fault," answered Thomasina with graceful heroism.

"My goodness, Per, how smart you have made yourself!" cried Eva laughing. "Why, you have all Ina's things on! I never saw you so grand before!"

Mr. Brocklebank turned his eyes on the rebel with no sunshine in them, none of that glittering

brightness which stood with him for tenderness. They were dull and pale and hard and fishy, almost as if a film were over them; as was the way with him when annoyed.

"Miss Perdita's unwonted magnificence is flattering to my poor escort," he said slowly; "but I own I like her best in her native simplicity; and I like best of all willingness to please and readiness to obey a well-meant suggestion."

"I am so sorry!" said Perdita, overwhelmed with confusion and feeling horribly ill-treated by fate and appearances.

Really it was too bad! Whatever she did she got blame and rebuke. Her life was a perpetual steerage between Scylla and Charybdis, and she had the most extraordinary faculty, not only of never steering clear, but of falling upon both at once. In acting according to her own ideas of right she had offended Thomasina—in pleasing Thomasina she had offended Mr. Brocklebank; and she had been blameless in fact throughout. It was very unfortunate, and "I am so sorry!" she said with mournful truth.

"Let us lose no more time," said Mr. Brocklebank, still ruffled. "My carriage is at the door and dinner is already waiting. Allow me, madam," to Mrs. Winstanley, to whom he offered his arm —the girls following after.

"What a nuisance you are, Per!" said little Eva in an audible whisper. "Now, you have made

that dear, good, kind Mr. Brocklebank angry and spoilt the whole evening!"

But when they were in the carriage—the ironmonger following in a hansom—Thomasina told her mother how the whole thing had happened; recommended Eva to hold her tongue and not tease Perdita any more; and to Perdita herself, whose tears were dimming her spectacles and dropping on to her gloves and gown, she administered the tonic of a cold rebuke, saying:

"Please, Perdita, don't make a goose of yourself like this. Do you want Mr. Brocklebank to think you care for him so much that this very natural annoyance makes you cry?"

"No!" said Perdita, with an indignant sob.

"Then dry your eyes and don't be silly. We do not cry when we dine at a restaurant und go to the theatre!" said Thomasina, with frosty disdain and undeniable good sense.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE PLAY.

How much soever he might have been annoyed, it was not in the nature of man to remain sulky in the circumstances which Mr. Brocklebank had gathered round him. A well-washed, heavily-scented, modern Sardanapalus, standing treat to four nicely got-up women of varying degrees of

beauty and fascination—a Great Mogul with his handkerchief in his hand, looking round pondering before throwing and the potential possessor of any of the four—a beneficent kind of muscular fairy, a hirsute elf, giving three nice little fat natives as a ladylike whet to fastidious appetites; slacking youthful thirst with sweet bright sparkling Champagne such as the feminine palate loveth; and 'topping up,' as he himself called it, with a gorgeous box at the theatre—an autocratic Pasha fêting his harem and rewarded for so much outlay of thought and gold by eight handsome eyes looking at him tenderly, eight pleasant lips smiling on him gratefully—how could he wrap himself so closely in the mantle of sullenness that the dew of those softer influences, the sunshine of that delicious and quickening gratitude, should not penetrate beneath the gloomy folds and reach the living heart beneath?

Mr. Brocklebank was by no means famous for geniality or plasticity of temper—not in the least the kind of man of whom people would say approvingly: "He is so easy to get on with!" But he was human like any one else and capable of being mollified if taken the right way. And by the time the oysters had been eaten, the Chablis had been sipped and the glass of Champagne had been what he called 'turned over,' he had forgiven Perdita whose evident contrition touched him—thought Thomasina the perfection of good-breed-

ing and graceful bearing--told kittenish Eva that she was the sweetest little mouse and prettiest little rosebud in the world, and had even given tender glances and said gallant speeches to the well-preserved mother of the triad. In fact, as Eva said afterwards, "the horrid old bear was spoons all round," and the whole thing began to go as merrily as marriage bells.

Every one was gratified and all were at their best. Mrs. Winstanley gave up guessing Which? as a hopeless puzzle to be decided only by time, and let herself enjoy the good things of the present without worrying herself about that thick blanket of futurity. Thomasina warmed up under the influence of stimulating food and delicate wine into a very fair representation of a red-blooded vertebrate; and Thomasina warmed, was Thomasina entrancing. Eva forbore to say disagreeable things under the guise of childish innocence, and left off for the time her favourite amusement of picking holes in Perdita's sensitive skin; and Perdita herself, when the cloud of her patron's displeasure had lifted, was as bright as a summer's sky and full of frank pleasure and girlish excitement. She was so glad to be taken into favour again by the man whom she regarded as her benefactor, and therefore loved as a passionate and grateful creature does naturally love one who has been friendly. And then beyond these more evident causes of mild felicity she was

bearing about with her the secret sense of having received some great gift of beauty, some sweet, strange influence of—joy of having met with an angel by the way that evening—of having had some spiritual grace bestowed, the glorious joy of which she had never known till now.

She was so happy, so much at ease, so free from that nervous shyness which was at once the bane of her peace and the blemish of her personality—she was so unlike Perdita the testifying democrat, Perdita the rebel against home law and fashionable command, Perdita the Stoic—that her mother looked at her more than once and wondered in her own mind to what cause this change was owing. Then she looked at Benjamin Brockle-bank, and thought her undesirable daughter mad or blind. Could she love that man? If she encouraged him she loved him. She was not one to marry for social duty like that wise Thomasina, and let love go by the board. But what detestable taste she must have! what a rough, coarse, unrefined mind to love that man!

"However, that is her affair not mine," thought Mrs. Winstanley with a little sigh. "I could have understood and respected my good Thomasina, who would have sacrificed herself to him from a sense of duty, who would have made the best of him, but would never have affected to love him; but that Perdita should have a real honest inclination for him—it is revolting! But I wish those

debts were paid!" she mentally added, and gave another little sigh. "The last time I added them all up they were above two thousand pounds; and I have not two thousand pence to pay them with!"

After which she toyed with some grapes and resolutely ignored that Black Care sitting like Sindbad's Old Man of the sea across her neck, and laughed and talked with as much *abandon* as a lady-like mother might allow herself to show.

Then they all went off to the theatre, the ironmaster preceding his convoy in a hansom as before.

"We will put the three young ladies in front and Mrs. Winstanley and her humble servant will sit behind," said Mr. Brocklebank gallantly. "Three pretty maidens all of a row; and upon my soul they make my box the flower-bed of the theatre!"

"Then what are you? a flower too?" asked little Eva prettily. "What flower are you, Mr. Brocklebank? a sunflower?"

"I, Miss Eva? I am no flower at all, else I would be a sunflower as you say, and you should be my luminary; no, I am your gardener, which is the more proper thing perhaps."

"I think you are a very nice gardener," said Eva, with the sweetest, quaintest gravity that could be imagined. "And your flower-bed is delicious; I should like to be planted in it every night."

In return for which pretty speech, Mr. Brocklebank, who was rapidly becoming as familiar in action as he was oddly formal in speech, put his arm boldly round Eve's fairy waist and gave her an unmistakable hug. And Mrs. Winstanley looking on, prudent, ladylike, well-bred and the most careful mother in the world as she was, neither felt nor expressed dissatisfaction.

There are moments of mild Saturnalia even for ladylike mothers; and this was one of them.

Naturally Eva was placed in the middle. It was the most prominent place, and for a show-girl the child was undeniably the most effective of the three. Thomasina's charm was one more of manner and nearer observation; but Eva's colouring told as a picture, an Mr. Brocklebank was anxious that his box should make a good appearance. Thomasina had the place of honour fronting the stage, and Perdita that which faces the house and necessitates a screwed spine for the boards. But it was a large box and all saw well, as also all were well seen.

They took their places just as the orchestra assembled and the lights were turned up. For Mr. Brocklebank, knowing what young ladies were in the matter of pleasure, as he said, had taken care to be in time for the very beginning of all things, and took credit to himself that they had not lost even the introductory tuning of the fiddles.

Nothing happened to disturb the serenity of

the party. Perdita, like all people of her temperament, was passionately fond of the theatre. She gave the whole strength of her mind and attention to the stage; was indifferent to the glare of the gaslights; knew nothing of that twist in her spine, that contortion of her neck; saw no one in the place; lived only in the drama; and said but little even during the fall of the curtain. She was in a dream and she did not wish to be awakened.

Thomasina looking to the stage saw nothing of the house, and employed her time in taking mental notes of the leading dresses. With very few alterations they might be made the model of her own; and she was sure that they would become her superbly. She did not know much of what was going on before her, but she could have given an accurate description of the sleeves and skirts which made the importance of the play to her. Where others seized points she dissected shapes; where others watched faces, voices, gestures, she threaded the millinery maze with a quickness that was genius in its own way—knew whether that breadth was on the straight or the cross—where that end of sash was fastened—how those folds were looped and made. Eva's bright eyes roved far and wide among the audience and made no pretence of exclusive devotion to the piece; and while she was looking here and there she spied out, in the stalls, a well-known glossy, sleek black head, with the hair cut into a fringe-like festoon

on the forehead, well-waxed moustache elaborately twisted and that pronounced expression of kid gloves, a button-hole bouquet and spotless linen, characteristic of gilded youth in general and the Parisian in particular.

One rapid glance betrayed the presence of the man whom, now in England, she most dreaded to see again.

Her fair face flushed to the roots of the hair; but she dropped her fan and the act of stooping to pick it up accounted for that sudden rush of blood which else might have attracted some attention. Bois-Duval made a rapid, half imperceptible little movement with his hand. The fingers joined in a bunch on the lips sent the airiest little kiss through space to the pretty creature overhead, and Eva, frightened though she was, and feeling trapped and caught, could not resist the temptation of a little bit of secret coquetry, and answered back the signal with an expressive flirt of her fan. Then Bois-Duval stood up boldly and looked at the group through his opera-glasses.

"Oh, mumsey!" said Eva leaning across Thomasina's back to her mother. "Who do you think I see in the stalls? that Frenchman you knew at Trouville, le Vicomte de Bois-Duval! How funny that he should be in London, and here to-night!"

"Indeed! Is he here? Does he recognize us?" asked Mrs. Winstanley, looking down while she arranged her tuckers.

"Yes, I think so, don't you, Ina?" replied Eva. "Oh, yes he does!" here she smiled and waved her hand. "He is bowing to us, mother. Lean forward and bow to him, darling—I don't like to be the only one:—bow, Ina!"

Thomasina's handsome face, which had been rounder and softer and more smoothed out than usual, during that study of stage millinery made with so much zeal, became white and rigid. She knew her little sister's possibilities and suspected underhand play; but this time wrongfully. Bois-Duval had come to London without preconcertion as to time, though Eva had told him where she lived and had expressed a hope that he would come and see them; and his presence at the theatre to-night was a mere coincidence, as sometimes happens for good or ill in life.

"Bow, Ina," repeated Eva impatiently.

"I do not see him," said Thomasina coldly, looking the other way.

"He is not there, Ina; he is in the stalls!" said Eva still impatient. "How odd that you cannot see him! You are not short-sighted."

"Who is Miss Eva dispensing her smiles to in that lavish way?" asked Mr. Brocklebank with more uneasiness than grammatical accuracy.

In his character as Great Mogul and potential possessor, he resented intruders and co-partners in equal measure; and it was something of a personal offence to himself that his ladies should have

found another male acquaintance at the theatre where he desired to reign supreme.

"Who is it?" he asked again, craning forward and seeing nothing.

"A gentleman we knew in Trouville," returned Eva with the prettiest and most innocent animation. "It seems so funny to see him here! It reminds one of the sea—that delicious sea-breeze!—and of those funny bathing-dresses. Don't you remember, mumsey, those queer little children, just like monkeys? those two little things in striped blue and white that tumbled about all legs and arms and looked just like frogs? How funny it all was!" laughing.

"It does one good to hear little Miss Eva's merry voice," said Mr. Brocklebank appeased. "Without flattery I may say that I think that laugh of hers the merriest and most musical thing in the world. It warms one's heart to hear it!"

"You are very kind to say so," said Mrs. Winstanley with a gracious smile which hid the trouble into which the presence of Bois-Duval had cast her as effectually as a bandage hides a sore. "I sometimes fear I spoil her, just a little," she continued with a fond reflective maternal air. "But she is so sweet and charming—she is so full of fun and innocence—that I confess I have not the heart to check or sadden her. She is my little ray of sunshine, as her eldest sister is my prop and support."

"And my young friend, Miss Perdita?" he asked, looking from one to the other of the three girls with a benign smile, but looking last and longest at Perdita.

"She? She is my Genius, as you know," said Mrs. Winstanley, smiling in the sweetest way. "I love all my children, but I reverence my daughter Perdita as much as I respect Thomasina and delight in little Eva."

Mr. Brocklebank looked pleased.

"You are right, madam," he said fervently. "She is a young lady to be reverenced!"

At that moment a knock came to the door of the box and Mr. Brocklebank rose to open it.

A woman of decidedly remarkable appearance presented herself. She was dressed in a satin gown of flaming scarlet; round her throat was a broad, heavy, silver dog-collar, and on her neck rows on rows of those green iridiscent shells which are the apotheosis of the street whelk. Her white hair, combed straight up from her face, fell down her back in youthful waves; and she had rings and brooches and bracelets and artificial flowers wherever they could be placed. It was our old friend Bell Blount, in what she herself would have called her war paint—at all events in the dress by which she hoped to convince an unbelieving generation that manly principles do not necessarily exclude feminine graces, and that it is possible to fight for woman's rights and yet retain her charms.

"Is Perdita Winstanley to be spoken to?" asked Bell in her most caressing voice and with republican simplicity of address.

Up jumped Perdita, glad, hurried, awkward, embarrassed.

"Oh, is that you?" she said, in the foolish way of people when they are taken aback and have lost their self-possession.

"Yes," said Bell, taking her hand in both of hers and kissing her affectionately. "Yes, I am here; and seeing you I could not resist the temptation of paying you a visit in your box. When are you coming to see me again? I have to talk to you about a great many things, and I want you to come to our next meeting. It is to be on Wednesday. Will you come, dearie?"

"If mother will let me," said Perdita with extreme confusion.

Turning to her mother she said hurriedly:

"This is my friend, Mrs. Blount, mother." Looking at Bell she added, "My sisters — Mr. Brocklebank," and then wished that she could have dissolved into pure spirit or have fainted on the floor.

Perdita had no lack of moral courage; but moral courage is not obtuseness of perception nor want of the power to feel pain and dread strife. On the contrary, with all sensitive people and those who are not upheld by crazy vanity, the courage of their opinions includes infinite suffering,

only second to that which would come to them through the self-abasement of disloyalty; and it is sometimes even a harder trial to have to stand by an inharmonious and unconventional friend than by an unpopular belief.

But Perdita was loyal to her finger-tips, and could no more have 'cold-shouldered' Bell because her presence here was unwelcome, than she could have committed a theft or told a lie.

"I do not understand your request, my dear," said Mrs. Winstanley suavely. "To what meeting does this person—this friend of yours—refer?"

"The second of our bi-monthly meetings, madam," said Bell in her clearest and most oratorical voice. "I am permanent chairwoman of the West Hill Female Suffrage Association, and I want my young friend Perdita to hear one of our most famous speakers, Mrs.——."

"You must excuse me if, taken so completely by surprise, I decline to give my consent to my daughter mixing herself up in this very questionable movement—at least until further consideration. The whole thing has come on me like—like—a thunderbolt," said Mrs. Winstanley.

Bell Blount laughed and at her laugh, so clear and resonant, many turned their opera-glasses to the box, and among them Bois-Duval, with a smile that said as plainly as words: "Qu'elles sont drôles, ces Anglaises!"

"We will soon indoctrinate you, my dear

lady," she said, with audacious good humour. "My little friend here was very hard at first to inoculate. But I think she has got it by now—hey, what do you say, honey?" putting her broad hand under Perdita's chin and turning up her face with ostentatious familiarity.

Perdita did not speak. Mrs. Winstanley rose and looked Junonic and severe.

"I devoutly hope not," she said with emphasis. "Should you like to see your protégée one of those dreadful women's rights women, Mr. Brocklebank?" she added, turning to the ironmaster who stood at the back of the box indignant and revolted.

"Certainly not, Mrs. Winstanley! I would rather see her the honest wife of an honest man, submissive to her duties and casting up her weekly accounts with accuracy. I set my face against the whole movement, madam; and until she confesses it with her own lips I shall not believe Miss Perdita guilty of this folly, this extravagance. To go to the Post-office Savings Bank, and to be a John Jenny, wanting to cut off men's legs and sit in the House of Commons, is a very wide step; and I take leave to doubt that Miss Perdita has taken it."

"I think she has," said Bell Blount, still audacious and good-humoured. "We'll put her into the witness-box for herself. Speak, my pretty! Don't you think that, between fine ladyism and subjection, the condition of women is very deplor-

able, and that they ought to be more independent on the one hand and more industrious on the other? Do you think they were meant to be mere dressed-up dolls here, or poor, ignorant, down-trodden drudges there? Do you think they should be able to manage for themselves—live their own lives—be themselves—do their own business—or just wait like so many slaves in the market-place till some man graciously consents to buy them for his married servant? Say what you think, honey! Tell truth and shame the—old gentleman!"

"Yes, I think they ought to be both more independent and more industrious," said Perdita—she too speaking in a clear voice.

Bell Blount smiled, clapped her hand on the back and cried: "Bravo! I knew you were 'clear grit,' as the Americans say!"

Mrs. Winstanley shrugged her shoulders and sighed as at a new manifestation of insanity; but Benjamin Brocklebank, as his last testimony to friendship—his last gun fired in defence of his protégée—said in a heavy, dictatorial, clinching kind of way:

"Miss Perdita is too good to be led astray. She must not be made a fool of; and Mrs. Winstanley, madam, *I* will undertake to cure her of this disease. It is like the pip in chickens and can be got rid of by proper measures."

Bell Blount's fine face became nearly as red as her dress.

"The conceit of that wretched creature man!" she said with a forced laugh. "We know our truest friends better than that, don't we, honey?" to Perdita.

"Mr. Brocklebank is my good friend too," said Perdita, looking at him affectionately. "The good friend of all the family," she added warmly.

"A heart of gold! A heart of gold!" said Mr. Brocklebank with pompous patronage, but enthusiastically as well. "Mrs. Winstanley need give herself no sort of uneasiness—none whatsoever, in any shape or form! Miss Perdita is true blue throughout—a thorough woman, whatever little twist may have been communicated to her ideas; but no one need be afraid of her forgetting the proprieties due to her age and sex. And now, madam," to Bell Blount, "by your leave—the play has recommenced."

The play may have recommenced, as the ironmaster phrased it, but the glory of it had departed for Mrs. Winstanley. Between the embarrassing advent of Bois-Duval and the intrusion of this bold, odd-looking person who claimed Perdita as her friend and advocated independence in woman and disregard of men and marriage, she felt as if she were performing penance, not receiving pleasure; and caught herself wondering how people could be so silly and light-minded as to find amusement in the rubbish set before them on the stage. But she smiled at the right moment and said it was

a lovely mise-en-scène, an excellent situation and charmingly acted; and when it was all over and they were putting on their cloaks and clouds, she thanked Mr. Brocklebank with graceful effusion for the delightful evening that he had given them —the most delightful she ever remembered, she said, drawing her lengthy bow without apparent effort.

Thomasina echoed her mother's words with more gracefulness if less effusiveness; while little Eva added a whole string of caressing epithets which fell like shining pearls or scented petals from her rosebud mouth lined with those small, sharp, white, little teeth. Perdita looked at their Amphitryon, her honest eyes dark and warm, and said in a moved voice:

"It was delicious! How good you are!"

And somehow her thanks seemed to the iron-master the sweetest, the most vitalized, the most musical of all.

Then they filed out by the narrow passage and down the stairs to the vestibule; and there at the foot of the stairs stood Bois-Duval, looking for them with a sharpened face and eager eyes; and there stood also the tall form of Bell Blount, with her flowing hair of silver falling against the scarlet satin of her showy gown, and her bold self-satisfied face scanning the crowd for her favourite Perdita—that rebel whom she was giving her strength to make more rebellious still.

There was nothing very noteworthy in the greetings mutually given and received by Bois-Duval and the Winstanleys. He was polite, courteous, interested in their health, delighted to see them again and finding them all looking charming; —they were polite and courteous too, interested in his health, thinking him courageous to come to England in spite of its fogs and frosts, and hoping that he would not find the change from his own delightful climate too severe. He expressed himself as enthusiastic for England—English liberty, English religion, English manners; and they smiled, looked as if they believed him and returned the compliment on French politeness and French skies. Then he asked permission to pay his respects to them at their own house; and Mrs. Winstanley gave him their address and presented him to Mr. Brocklebank.

And when he had accomplished his main purpose then M. le Vicomte made an elaborate bow and withdrew; and Eva crushed into her pocket a little note, written in the theatre, and passed with the skill of a prestidigitateur.

Meanwhile Bell Blount had talked fast to Perdita, and Perdita had promised to go and see her the first hour that she had to give away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

THE next day was Sunday. Mrs. Winstanley, like all well-conducted people, was decorously Sabbatarian. It was part of her code of good manners; the respect due to the established order of things, like making a court curtsey when presented or giving people of rank their proper titles. Thus, besides church once in the day, an early dinner and only sacred music allowed in the evening, there were special observances for Sunday mornings. The prayers were longer and an extra chapter was read after breakfast—prayers always were after breakfast at 100 West Hill Gardens. Things get so spoiled by being kept warm on the top of the kitchen oven; yet it is so tiresome to have to wait till they can be got ready! Besides, cook does not like it. For which reasons Mrs. Winstanley compromised between devotion and convenience, and ate her breakfast in comfort before she said her prayers for consecration.

Backing up these special observances, a certain set, we might almost say solemn, demeanour marked the early part of the day. By the afternoon this solemnity had considerably relaxed. The breakfast, too, was touched with the characteristics of a minor

fast, inasmuch as it was shorn of all superfluous adjuncts and reduced to its primitive elements; and altogether the outward and visible signs of Sunday morning were as well marked in the Winstanley household as if the faded crimson curtains were changed for a Sabbatical drapery of black or the dingy claret-coloured walls had an hebdomadal wash of grey.

And till prayers were over and the chapter finished peace reigned between the ruler and the ruled whatever delinquency might be waiting for castigation; and it was only after the last good word of glad tidings had been said that the rod was taken out of the pickle.

On this special Sunday the breakfast was more than usually grave and silent. Respect for the day and the exercises that had to come kept the smouldering fires well under control; though in truth, smouldering everywhere beneath the surface was fire enough for a general domestic conflagration. Thomasina, who always followed her mother's lead, kept a face as still as marble, a manner as smooth as ice, though conscious that Perdita had offended and would be chastised, and that Eva's secret sin threatened to be troublesome. Eva, all flutter and excitement, was elated yet terrified that Bois-Duval had kept his promise of following her to England, and specially terrified lest Thomasina should betray what she already knew and find out still more that was hidden; while Perdita, haunted by Leslie's voice

as one is haunted by music, stirred by the unreal pathos of the play to which her own sincerity had given substance and truth, uneasy at her mother's evident displeasure and knowing that she had to suffer, was in one of those complex moods wherein glory and gloom traverse each other—rose-colour for love and sable for mourning crossing and interlacing in the great web of life. And Mrs. Winstanley herself—disturbed by the advent of Bois-Duval but, unwilling to plough with that heifer turning her wrath against her rebel whose misdeeds were as a waste-pipe always at hand for carrying off the overflowings of displeasure—sat at the head of the table like Nemesis in a becoming cap and well-fitting gown, waiting for the moment when she might come up with her victim and grip the offender's shoulder with her well-washed perfumed hand.

It was the dead calm that presages the storm; when the song-birds are silent and only the sensitive aspen-leaves are stirring. And in the Winstanley household when storms were threatened they always came. They might be storms which broke without much noise; all the same they did their work as effectually as those which made more clatter and were more uproarious.

When, therefore, the morning religious exercises were ended, the breakfast things removed, the books returned to their allotted places on the sideboard, the chairs set back against the wall, and the servant

had shut the door, then Mrs. Winstanley came up with her culprit, laid her hand on her shoulder and took out the avenging rod.

Perdita was leaving the room as usual. Her intercourse with her family was little more than 'commons' eaten in company and digested apart; and no one resented her withdrawal or wished that she should stay. But to-day, as she was making good her accustomed retreat to her own especial den, her mother stopped her.

"Stay, Perdita," she said; "I wish to speak to you."

Perdita's heart stood still with her feet. Though of late she had gained a little self-control—or fondly fancied that she had—she was perhaps more sensitive to pain and shrank from her mother's rebukes even more than she used before she had known the peace of respite and the joy of freedom.

"Yes, mother," she said nervously.

Her self-possession vanished. Old habits are strong; and the habit of opposition to, and expectation of rebuke from, her mother was almost as strong with Perdita as that of blushing when she was spoken to and of believing what she was told.

"Who was that creature who came into our box last night?" asked Mrs. Winstanley quietly.

She spoke with perfect calmness of voice and mien, as if she were asking an unimportant question

free from all connection or result, while arranging a few lighters in the spillbox on the chimney-piece.

"She is Mrs. Blount," said Perdita.

"And where did you meet this Mrs. Blount, may I ask?"

She pronounced the objectionable name as if it stuck to her lips and she had to throw it off by a jerk.

"At the Working Women's Self-Helping Institution," answered Perdita simply.

"My dear Perdita; what have you to do with working women or their institutions? And who in the name of fortune took you to such a place?"

"I went before you left town, mother—quite in the spring—before the flower-show even. You knew that I went, for Miss Cluff asked you to let me go with her. You knew all about it, mother."

What a grand thing to be able to say this! If mother had not objected at the time then the burden of blame was shifted from those sore, overloaded little shoulders to the handsome back that was broad enough to bear any amount of wrong-doing.

"I remember—yes; I remember I was foolish enough to allow you to go to some unearthly place one evening when your sisters and I were engaged to the Disneys; but I do not remember your telling me of any acquaintance formed there, still less of an intimacy so unpleasantly familiar as that which was displayed last night. Why did

you not tell me of your--imprudence is too mild a term for your foolish conduct, Perdita! You said nothing about this creature in your letters. I can well understand why. You were ashamed."

"I did tell you, mother! I spoke of Mrs. Blount when I wrote to you," remonstrated Perdita.

"As if I could have supposed that a respectable Mrs. Anybody would be such a horror as that!" returned Mrs. Winstanley. "She looks out of her mind, or worse; if there can be anything worse. I do not know when I felt such painful humiliation!—and I hope I may never be exposed to the same thing again. She is unfit for the society of ladies, and it is degrading to be seen with her."

"She dresses oddly, I know, but she is thoroughly good and sterling, and as honest—oh, as honest as the day!" said Perdita with faithful advocacy.

"No sentimentality or heroics, Perdita!" said her mother in a warning voice. "Your phœnix is simply a vulgar oddity, and I forbid your continuing your acquaintance with her. I cannot have a child of mine claimed as an intimate personal friend by such a horror."

"Oh, mother, I cannot give her up! I have no reason! She is very very good, though she has such queer taste in dress; and she was so kind to me in the summer while you were away! It was then I got to know her so well. It would be

too ungrateful in me to give her up only because she dresses badly and looks odd."

Perdita said this with the well-known passionate ring in her deepened voice and the ready tears glistening in her eyes. Those tears betokened no weakening of the joints of her resolution. They sprang rather from the very force of her feeling—which with her was strength.

"You dislike to appear ungrateful, but you have no disinclination to be disobedient and undutiful?" said her mother with smooth severity.

"Mother, you ask so much of me! You want me to give up all that I hold to be true and right—you ask me for my Conscience!" said Perdita in the strained and nervous way she had when deeply moved. "You allow me no freedom either of thought or action," she went on to say in increasing agitation. "You want me to be a mere machine. And I cannot give up my Soul, even to a mother! What I feel to be right that I must cling to—I must, mother! I must!"

She put her clasped hands before her mouth as if to keep back more than it were well to say, her dilated eyes fixed on her mother, her supple body quivering.

"My dear Perdita, let me beg of you to remember that this is Sunday morning, and that I can have no hysterics before church," said Mrs. Winstanley quite quietly. "And I assure you I want no such awful sacrifice as you speak of. I

do not want you to give me up your soul, my poor child, nor your conscience. I should be rather embarrassed with the possession of either. I merely want you to be a young lady like the rest of the world; like your sisters, for instance. Surely no such terrible condemnation!"

"They are your companions and you love them. I am the one shut out," said Perdita passionately. "I have no friends, no companions at home, and yet you object to my making them for myself out of doors. Mother, it is not fair, it is not just, it is not human!"

The flood-gates were lifting in good earnest and the pent-up torrent was beginning to flow. A very little more and there would be one of those scenes of violence which Perdita had vowed to herself should never occur again, and which she was as powerless to prevent when the occasion arose as she would have been powerless to stop a runaway unbitted horse.

"If you would choose proper and fitting friends no one would be so glad to see you surrounded by good influences as I," said Mrs. Winstanley. "But your foolish ideas lead you into worse than foolish action, and I cannot trust your judgment. This person—this Mrs. Blount, as you call her—is no fit friend for me or my daughters."

"She will not trouble you, mother. She does not ask to come here. She only wants to see

me every now and then at her own house," pleaded Perdita.

"You are my daughter and your actions implicate me as your mother," returned Mrs. Winstanley. "You cannot make acquaintances on your own responsibility as if you did not belong to us. A family must hang together; and what you do touches us all."

And in this she spoke sensibly enough.

"Am I to have no friends then!" cried Perdita in the accent of one wrecked and desperate.

"It is your own fault if you do not find your friends in your mother and sisters, and your companions in those whom they make their own," said Mrs. Winstanley. "Besides, you have one already — a very true and sincere friend — Mr. Brocklebank."

As she said this she turned her eyes suddenly on her daughter and looked at her with a keen, sharp, penetrating glance.

"Yes, he is very good to me," said Perdita with exasperating affectionateness, not betraying the faintest special agitation; "but he is not my friend as a woman would be. I could not talk to him as to Mrs. Blount or——" She was on the point of adding, "Mrs. Crawford," but checked herself in time.

"Still, he is your special friend and is sincerely interested in you," repeated Mrs. Winstanley. "He

has helped you in this Savings Bank business against my wishes as you know; and therefore you owe him some gratitude. And evidently he does not approve of your Mrs. Blount."

"He would if he knew her; that is, if he is as good as I believe him to be," said Perdita hardily. "He might not agree with all her opinions, but he would respect her; and he would soon get over her appearance. Mr. Brocklebank is just the kind of person to like her, because he cares more for things as they are than as they seem to be."

"You are hopeless!" said Mrs. Winstanley turning away. "It is simple waste of time to reason with you! But understand me clearly, Perdita," she added, turning back and facing her rebel; "I positively forbid your further acquaintance with this woman, and if you disobey me I will write to her myself and tell her so."

"Mother! No! Surely you will never do anything so cruel!" cried Perdita. "Poor Bell Blount who has done nothing to offend you—who is so good and true—and who has been so kind to me! You could not be so unjust. Oh, mother, how can you say such a thing!"

"You hear me, Perdita?" repeated the mother slowly, as if it were a lesson to be learnt by heart. "If you continue your acquaintance with this person, against my command, I will write to her forbidding it;—and I will write such a letter as she will not soon forget. If you wish to spare

your friend this humiliation," sarcastically, "drop her on your own account. It will be safest. Now silence! say no more. This is Sunday morning."

Whereon, to make sure of that Dominical calmness which was part of her good-breeding and which by the look of Perdita's face and attitude was more than problematical if this interview were continued, Mrs. Winstanley beat her own retreat, and left the rebel standing about two feet from the hearthrug, her flushed face bent downward, her eyes full of indignant tears, her lips quivering with grief and passion together, and her soul driven about in a very whirlwind of despair.

Thomasina had been sitting by the little side-table writing a letter during the whole of this painful interview. She had taken no part in it, thinking it better to let the two concerned have it out between them without interference from without. But she was sorry. She knew of course that Perdita was very rebellious, very tiresome, very irritating, yet she was anxious to spare her more sorrow if she could. Knowing what she did of Eva whose colours were always fresh and flying, suspecting she scarcely dared to say what, Perdita's chronic misbehaviour from silly Quixotism rather than intentional naughtiness, somehow seemed less reprehensible than in general; and she thought there had been enough 'discipline' on account of Bell Blount—with M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval spoken to humanely and even invited

to the house! Also she thought probably Perdita was softened to the point when good counsel would prevail, and that, if spoken to now, reasonably and kindly, she might yield and be led aright.

She got up from her writing and came to where her sister was standing, her poor wild soul tossed and driven in the tumultuous Maelstrom of passion and despair.

"Now take my advice, Perdita," she said, speaking more tenderly than that ostracized rebel ever remembered to have been spoken to by her; "do not make a trouble between yourself and mother because of this woman, whoever she may be. Give her up without any more fuss, like a dear, good girl. It is your best wisdom, believe me!"

"But not my best morality!" said Perdita, with a sob for the one part, and a loving look at her queenly sister for the other.

Thomasina looked at her as compassionately as if she had been a suicidal lunatic. Penetrated through and through with the doctrine of social expediency she was of the class which holds conscience as a luxury lawful only to the prosperous who want nothing from the world. For those in the fight it is an impediment, a folly and a sin.

"I do not see what morality has to do with it," she said. "If anything, I should say it was in doing as mother wishes. This new woman

cannot be so near to you surely as your own mother!"

"No, she is not so near to me, but she likes me far better than my own mother does," said Perdita, imprudent and and sincere as usual.

Thomasina let the foolish words pass unheeded. She was not in the mood to embitter or entangle; she only wanted to make things smoother and softer.

"Besides," continued Perdita," if mother had any real reason for her dislike, I should not say a word. But I do not think it a reason for hurting the feelings of a good woman who likes me and has been very kind to me, that she dresses showily and looks queer."

"It is not your place to ask or argue on mother's reasons," said Thomasina, mildly but firmly; "all that you have to do is to obey her."

"I cannot, Thomasina! I cannot do what I think to be wrong, even for mother. God is highest!" said Perdita with solemn warmth.

"You take things so tremendously in earnest, Perdita!" said her sister, a slight smile crossing her face. "There is no such high and mighty principle involved in this matter as you make out. You know a woman whom mother does not like and whose acquaintance she wants you to give up—and you talk of God and your concience. Why, there would be no living if we all went on like

this! It is breaking a butterfly on the wheel, child! —nothing less. How can you be so silly, Perdita?"

She spoke with temperate and patient sarcasm; not acid, but smiling, half-playful, remonstrating rather than contemptuous.

"Thomasina, dear! I cannot be different from what I am!" said poor Perdita, turning to her sister with sudden meekness, but always in such terrible earnest! "I cannot see things as you do or think that it is of no importance whether we do right or wrong. I think it right to stick to friends who have been kind to me, and wrong to desert them without good cause and only because of some stupid little worldly reason, which is none at all! How can I help myself? how can I do what I feel to be base and cowardly?"

"Well! I am sorry. You are all wrong, and will not let yourself be put right," said Thomasina with a quiet little sigh. "It seems to me just insanity to make a principle of everything, and to see a crime in giving up the acquaintance of an odd-looking woman whom mother does not like. But you must do as you like, of course. I only thought it right to speak to you and do what I could to help you with mother. But no one has any influence over you, Perdita;—you are so awfully self-willed!"

"It is not self-will, Thomasina. It is not because *I* like to do so and so, but because I think it right or wrong," she reiterated.

"Well, let it drop now. I am sorry; for I dislike all these family quarrels so much, and I know that mother means to be firm about this woman. And if you were only a little tractable, and more like other people, there would never be a disagreeable word among us. Eva and I never have a moment's unpleasantness with mother from one end of the year to the other; and not a week goes by without some horrible jar between you and her."

"But is it always my fault?" pleaded her sister.

"Always," said Thomasina steadily; "always your fault, Perdita. "You do not consider other people enough—you think only of yourself. For instance, there is Mr. Brocklebank who is so good to you—when do you think of him?"

Thomasina spoke with quiet deliberation and, as her mother before her, watched her sister's face narrowly. But that face, usually so sensitive, told nothing. No blush came on it at the mention of the ironmaster's name, for no chord was struck in her heart to vibrate into consciousness.

"I do very often think of him," she said, astonished at the accusation. "I like Mr. Brocklebank very much indeed. I am sure I ought, for he has been very good to me; but what has that to do with Mrs. Blount?"

"What? Everything; because he would tell you

to do as mother says—to give her up if mother wishes it."

"But if I do not think it right to do this for mother, how should I for him?" asked Perdita gravely.

"Yet he likes you the best of us all," replied Thomasina, throwing her fly.

"No, he likes you," answered her sister, rejecting it in all simplicity and good faith.

"Not at all—he likes you by far the best, Perdita! I daresay he will tell you so himself some day. Is that the church bell? We have no time to spare," she added hurriedly, as her sister was about to speak. "We must make haste, else we we shall be late."

On which they both went upstairs to dress; and soon after the Winstanley family set out for church with the discreetest and quietest air in the world, as if halcyon days were as real at No. 100 as they seemed to be, and the moral sunshine there knew no break. And when they were in church, the prayers and hymns went to poor Perdita's heart as they had never done before; and though the sermon was nothing but dry bones, she lent it the pathos of her own suffering, and wept over platitudes which left the bulk of the congregation untouched, save that the phlegmatic yawned and the nervous fidgeted. But both prayers and sermon only strengthened her in her

feeling of doing what was right, irrespective of consequences or conditions.

As they were coming out, a little check in the earlier-moving part of the congregation brought them all in a closely-packed mass at the door; and there, touching shoulders with Mrs. Winstanley, stood Leslie Crawford and his mother.

A quick flush crossed Leslie's face, and Mrs. Crawford smiled a pale watery kind of smile as she looked at Perdita; but they would have passed on without other recognition than that plaintive smile from her, and from him the raising of his hat, had not Perdita herself spoken to him. In truth, she would have been glad under present conditions to have let them pass without a closer greeting, but that troublesome conscience of hers said that this would be cowardly, mean, base, ungrateful; and if it were against her principles to be less than true to her intellectual convictions, so much the more was it to be less than loyal to her friends.

"How do you do?" she said, and held out her hand to each.

Her face was crimson and she really suffered. She felt as if he carried "Chemist in High Street" printed in one huge label from his hat to his boots; and that every one could read in her face what they had been talking of together last night. Still, she was nothing if not sincere to her faith

and true to her friends; and, right or wrong, she must do what she felt to be the best thing.

"Is little Lily better, Mrs. Crawford?" she asked with interest; and on the elder woman answering: "Yes, thank you, the feverish attack has passed," Perdita looked bright and said: "I am glad!" with real feeling in her voice.

"Perdita, who are those people to whom you spoke at the church-door?" asked Mrs. Winstanley with disdainful emphasis when they had got clear of the crowd.

Her quick eyes had discovered that they were not inheritors of the purple, ragged or otherwise—that Mrs. Crawford, sweet and gentle as she was, well-dressed too in her own quiet quakerish way, was without that untranslatable *chic* which is like a masonic sign to the initiated, and that, although Leslie was a handsome well-grown man with a fine face and a good address, he too failed in his shibboleth and could not spell his abracadabra as he ought.

"Who are they?" she repeated with an indescribable accent of superior curiosity.

"Mrs. Crawford and her son," answered Perdita.

"Yes? and then? Who are Mrs. Crawford and her son?"

"He is the chemist in High Street, where I was taken ill. I wrote and told you about it," said Perdita, trying to look indifferent; and failing.

"And you have become on intimate terms with them?"

"I go to see them sometimes," she answered.

"You visit them in private? shake hands with them in public?" said Mrs. Winstanley, speaking very slowly and distinctly, every word set clear from its neighbour.

"Yes; why not, mother?" answered Perdita. "Mrs. Crawford is delightful in every way, and so is he," she added with an effort that was really heroic. But as she spoke her face was overspread with that treacherous blood which for ever betrayed her so cruelly, and her voice was a trifle husky.

"You have sunk yourself so low as this? You make a personal friend of a man who sells drugs and stands behind a counter?—of a man who keeps a shop? Perdita! are you really my own daughter?"

"Why not, mother?" she answered, rising to the necessities of her position. "I have put myself on the same level with good, generous, well-conducted people who know far more than I do and who are far better than I am—people who are as refined as we are, and who are as good as anything in the world can be. I do not call it sinking, mother. In reality it is honouring and raising myself."

By this time they had reached their own door. Mrs. Winstanley rang the bell, standing on the top step. She turned round and looked at Perdita

who was on the pavement. The extra vantage of those three steps seemed to give her a corresponding increase of moral power; but Perdita by this time had brought out her flag and was in the full swing of faithful adherence even unto martyrdom and death. Of what good all her prayers and tears in church just now, if she could not remain firm under trial?

"Understand me, my dear," said Mrs. Winstanley, calm, scornful, inflexible. "You make your choice—your mother, your sisters, your home, or these new people whom you have taken up in our absence. You cannot have both. If you continue to live with me you must conform to my manner of life and content yourself with my friends. That creature of last night and these persons of to-day are inadmissible. I am sure I need not recur to the subject again."

As she said this the door was opened and they all went into the house, Mrs. Winstanley rather proud of the firmness with which she had put down the latest of her daughter's objectionable follies, and Perdita flung again as so often before into a passionate tumult of alternatives—forbidden to lead her own life and unable to accept that allowed her, and in the agonies of choice between obedience to her mother or adherence to the dictates of her own conscience.

Mrs. Winstanley was spared all trouble of this kind. With her there was no doubt as to the

right thing to do. Her duty was clear, her line single. Perdita was wrong from first to last, morally, conventionally, as a daughter and a lady alike; and it was her own bounden duty, as the mother of the family, to crush this foolish rebellion from the outset and to protect her other children by preventing the wicked vagaries of this troublesome and unsatisfactory mutineer. It was not a pleasant task—but then duty is seldom pleasant; and this was duty.

As for poor Perdita, all that afternoon she sat upstairs in her own bleak room and wept and prayed—but came no nearer to a conclusion than if she had dismissed the subject from her mind and let things drift of themselves. She could not make up her mind to disobey her mother's express command, yet she could not do what she felt to be wrong and give up those dear friends who had been so good to her. Her heart failed her when she thought that she must never see Leslie again —he who represented to her all moral nobleness and manly worth!—never had the joy of feeling that she had a friend in him, a mother in his mother, nor know again the calm and refreshment of a visit to those quiet rooms above the shop. And yet again, was she prepared to give up her own home for the sake of theirs? to cut herself off from the family that she might continue to know Bell Blount and the Crawfords?

She could not understand why she should be

marked out for this perpetual rack of heart and torment of mind. She was conscious only of a desire to do the right thing—to live by principle and her own conscience. She did not wish to hurt any human being or to be other than faithful and true, loving and loyal. She was wicked, she knew, because she was passionate and violent and without self-command, but was she quite so wicked as mother said? Her life was one long day of trouble, confusion, unrest, perplexity. She was the pariah of the family, and, save for these dear friends whom now she had to give up, utterly unloved and alone. What was she to do? How could she go to them and say to the one: "Mother will not let me know you because you are tradespeople and keep a shop"—to the other: "Because you dress in scarlet satin and wear your white hair in a cascade of girlish ringlets down your back?" How could she confess to them that nothing scored honours in the Winstanley game of life but dead forms and flimsy conventionalities? and that she, Perdita, the democrat, the seeker after truth, the believer in realities, was weak enough to follow the same bad lead? It was impossible! And yet—could she leave home and cast herself adrift on the world like a mere adventuress? What a dreadful alternative!—what a terrible position!

So the day passed; and when evening came she was no nearer to the solution of her difficulties

than she had been at noon. All that she had gained was a face so swollen by tears as to be horribly disfigured, and a head that ached as if it would ache itself into a dozen different pieces.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCERTAIN AND PERPLEXED.

With the moral strength of her convictions Perdita had also the emotional weakness of her affections, and the two were for ever in collision. Hers was one of those composite and iridescent characters wherein each person affirms a different substance and sees an opposing colour. To some she was simply a fierce, ill-regulated, unfeminine kind of creature, whose misdeeds went beyond the limits of eccentricity and who needed a sound application of the chastising rod if she were to be made into a decent Christian like the rest of us; to others she was soft to want of self-respect, sensitive to an infirmity, her pity exaggerated to a vice, her sympathy to folly, her imagination to insanity, her conscientiousness to absurdity. Some saw her as hard, stiffnecked, unyielding; others as plastic, affectionate and eminently manageable. But her qualities were so strangely intermixed that no one was right and no one was wrong. It was as if this tract of fruitful mould suddenly ended in a

barrier of granite, that marble quarry tailed off into a field of sand—as if here the fierce lines of red flowed into a wash of lucent gold, there the blue of heaven deepened into flaming orange. No one could hold her entirely nor bend her to the point beyond her own limit of right. When her love and her conscience came into collision, as they did so often, her conscience won but her love did not diminish; and when pity and truth were at cross-corners, she would tell the truth but break her heart over the pain she felt herself bound to inflict. Yet the one whom she loved would have counted on the victory as a foregone conclusion based on the strength of her affections; and the creature whom she wounded would wonder how it was that she had not strained a point for pity's sake, as any other tender-hearted woman would have done.

Still, with all this moral firmness, having as was said the weakness of her affections, she suffered as only those suffer whose hearts are torn by conflicting loves and discordant principles of action.

In this moment of trial there was no one to give her comfort. Bell Blount ignored the inherent modesties of her sex and blasphemed both the natural ties of home and all the sweet instincts of womanhood. Mrs. Crawford ignored all need of mental freedom and condemned a woman's desire for any kind of life outside the narrow limits of domestic duties. And Benjamin Brocklebank, her special friend and patron, could no more sym-

pathize with her present trouble than he could with her mother's when she objected to work as unladylike and to bread-winning as degrading.

Where could she go for advice and counsel? —for confidential talk and wise monition? Scarcely, in this case, to the one to whom she would naturally have turned! She could not go to Leslie Crawford and ask him what she was to do? Her mother had forbidden her to go to his house, for no nobler reason than because he kept a shop and lived over it; and which then was her duty — obedience to that mother or fidelity to him?

Yet, pressed by the need of human sympathy, she opened so much of her heart to Mary Chesterton as could be seen in a hypothetical case, put cautiously and without details, wherein a mother's commands clashed with a daughter's conscience; and she ended by asking what Miss Chesterton thought of such a position, and what would she do were she placed in it?

To which Mary looked with her clear, untroubled eyes full into Perdita's tortured face and said quietly:

"I can hardly understand the difficulty, Miss Winstanley. There can be no two questions about it. Of course a daughter ought to obey her mother. Why! how preposterous! Surely no girl could hesitate for a moment about that!"

So Perdita got no satisfaction here, and the

composite nature was so far checkmated by the more simple.

As she was walking home from the office, her heart sad and her head heavy, she met Bell Blount streaming like a flamingo down the sunny side of Oxford Street up which she was passing in such deep melancholy.

"The Philistines have been upon you!" cried Bell, taking the girl's hot hands in her. "What have they been doing to you, my honey?"

Perdita tried to smile, but tears came instead.

"Oh! I say, this well never do!" cried Bell, turning back with her favourite and drawing her hand within her arm. "I am not going to stand you being bullied; that I can tell them! So just you open your heart, for I can see that something has gone wrong."

"It is only my own silly temper," said Perdita, with a little sobbing breath that seemed more eloquent of pain than perversity.

"Tut! Don't talk rubbish to me, my dear. You have been worried and trampled on and ill-treated, I can see that plainly enough; and before we part you shall have made a clean breast of it." She hailed a passing hansom. "Jump in," she said to Perdita; "Prince Christian's Road," she shouted to the cabman. "Now we will have a quiet talk," she went on to say to the girl when they were settled in the cab. "My little

wife is not at home, and we shall have an hour to ourselves."

So here was Perdita, forbidden by her mother to continue her acquaintance with Bell Blount, flourishing up Oxford Street in a hansom with her in the light of day, on her way to the house which she had been commanded never to enter again!

When they reached that queer, untidy, hybrid kind of place, Bell repeated her question.

"What is it, honey?" she asked, placing Perdita in an easy-chair, while she sat on the arm and lighted a cigarette. "Come! a clean breast and no reservations!"

Perdita looked down sorely troubled. Sensitive and soft-hearted, it was a dreadful punishment to her to have to say anything that might offend any one; but to hurt the feeling of a friend who had been ever good and kind to her, for no other reason than the most stupid conventional objection, was simply anguish. Still, she must be frank. It was the thing laid on her to do; but the trial was hard, the cup very bitter.

"I will tell you, Bell," she said, looking up and speaking with that earnest, half-caressing accent of self-abandonment which was one of her characteristics. "My mother forbids me to know you and the Crawfords."

"The Crawfords? That chemist fellow?" said Bell disdainfully. "There, my dear, your mother

is right. Those Crawfords are no fit companions for you. You are a little lady and they are only tradespeople. I longed to tell you so when you threw me over at the meeting for that pretentious pedant, that long-backed Leslie, whom I remember as a gangrel gawky with his sleeves half-way up his arms. But I reflected in time. I thought it was no business of mine, and I was not called on to interfere. If you had bad taste enough to like them, you must go through with it, I said to myself. I could afford to wait," she added with an odd look. "Still, your mother is right, honey!" she went on to say after a little pause which Perdita had not broken. "You ought not to make friends out of your class. We must respect social degrees as we find them. It is such a mistake when people push a wholesome principle into an absurdity; and the Emancipation of Woman does not include democratic equality or communistic mismash in any form! I have always steadily set my face against such wild ideas; and so must you."

"No," answered Perdita; "that is just what I cannot do, Bell! Men and women are men and women to me, not gentlemen and ladies on the one side and the common people on the other. And it is just as great a pain to me to have to give up the Crawfords, though they are tradespeople, as it would be if they were a duke and duchess. And greater," she added simply. "For

I should never feel at home with a duke and duchess, and I do with them."

"I am sorry for it," said Bell gravely. "If you knew all about them perhaps you would not. No, my honey, you are wrong here and your mother is right. You must give them up."

"And you too, Bell?" asked Perdita, without a trace of sarcasm.

"No, that is another matter altogether," answered the Champion of her Sex with perfect good faith. "You are not to give me up—because your mother's objections to me are founded only on ignorance and prejudice. I represent a principle; and you must stick to your principles, my dear, whatever it costs you."

"That is just what I feel about the Crawfords," said Perdita.

"Then that is just what you should *not* feel about the Crawfords," returned her friend with calm decision. "That is all nonsense, Perdita! Sticking to me as your best friend and the Leader of your Cause—yes, yours; so don't look at me like that;—is a very different thing from keeping up an acquaintance you ought never to have made, with people not in your own sphere of life and who do not even belong to the good Cause."

"I do not think mother will see the difference," said Perdita, still unconscious of irony.

"Then she must be made," returned Bell

Blount. "I will come and talk to her. If she has reasoning faculty at all I shall probably be able to touch it. If she has not—" she shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous half-pitying air.

"I do not think you will stir her," said Perdita.

"Never say die, honey," returned Bell. "This dear little soul of yours is worth a few cold looks and even hard knocks to try and save," she added, putting her hand under the girl's chin and turning up her face which then she kissed.

"You are very very good, Bell, but indeed I think you had better not come to our house! Mother is not to be moved by any reasoning whatever. You do not know her, and she will only be so angry!"

"With me or you?"

"With both."

"For myself I do not care a button whether she is angry or not," said Bell; "and if she is too hard on you—you know your remedy. Leave home and come to us."

"That is just what mother herself says," answered Perdita. "She has given me my choice to give up you and the Crawfords or to leave home."

"Say you so?" cried Bell. "Bravo! That is all I want. Your course is clear, your duty as plain as those railings before us. You just take and pack up your things, honey, and come off to us.

Connie will be as good as gold to you. I will be better than gold. Miss Long will do all she can for you; and you will be as happy as the day is long. It is just the thing I have been wanting and waiting for—just the occasion. So now Providence has smoothed the way for you and shown you the path. Glory! what a chance!"

But her jubilant enthusiasm fell flat on Perdita. This path, whether smoothed by Providence or not, was one which her feet refused to tread—the choice between her home and her friends that which she had no desire to make.

"I do not suppose you can hesitate," said Bell with a surprised little air and speaking slowly.

"Oh, Bell! not hesitate! Think what an awful thing it is for a girl to break with her own family! I know that mother is wrong in wanting me to make this sacrifice; but to disobey her so completely?—to leave them all and cut mysel adrift?—no! no! that is not a thing to be done lightly!"

"Not lightly, but firmly," said Bell in a deep voice. "The alternative is forced on you; you did not seek it. All you have to do is to choose and then hold fast. You cannot blow hot and cold together. You must be one thing or the other. To go so far and then turn back—to shilly-shally and let 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'—neither doing nor refraining—that is a weakness unworthy of you! Take your line and stick to it; but if

you give up me and the cause of woman's freedom—the holiest cause in the world—you are not the girl I took you for, and I shall be sorry I wasted a moment's thought or care on you!"

"You do not know what it is to have to make such a choice," said Perdita despairing of ever being understood.

"I do not? I? I not know what it is to have to make such a choice?" echoed Bell Blount with a raised voice. "I who gave up husband and home and station and children for the good Cause? I who destroyed my household gods and went out into the wilderness that I might free my sex from their persecutors and bring them into the light of day? What nonsense you are talking, Perdita! If ever woman sacrificed herself for humanity and principle it is I, Arabella Blount!"

"But was it a sacrifice?" asked honest Perdita. "You are happier as you are. You love Connie Tracy better than any one in the world. You have often told me so, and how you bless the day when you had the courage to leave your home."

Bell Blount's eyes flamed with sudden wrath.

"I did not expect this scoff from you!" she said vehemently. "I who have taken you to my heart and who have hoped great things for you—I scarcely expected that you would have turned against me like this!"

"I did not turn against you!" cried Perdita

aghast. "I did not mean to be rude or scoffing, Bell, I only meant that your trial was not so hard as mine because you did not care so much. I meant that—no more, dear."

"You are unjust," said Bell, rising from her seat. "You always are unjust to women. You care too much for men to see things as they are. I foresee your destruction through these dangerous, disloyal, unwomanly tendencies," she added with a peculiar kind of snort, the sign with her of extreme displeasure. "Some day you will go to the dogs and I shall find you there!"

"I do not think this is quite fair; and what has it to do with the matter whether I like men or women the best? In point of fact I like women," said Perdita, feeling as if another stone had been cast against her and another wound inflicted.

"Pshaw!" said Bell. "You don't know what you are saying. You like men ever so much better than your own holy sex. And if you did not you would not hesitate now."

"Why? What do you mean?" cried Perdita, trembling she scarcely knew why. There was something in the very inconsequence and vagueness of the accusation that half frightened her.

Bell Blount turned and caught her to her breast.

"Oh, Perdita!" she cried with strange emotion. "Throw off this degrading instinct, this shameful soul-destroying inclination! See things as they are

—see and acknowledge that men are our tyrants, maternity our curse, love our destruction—and devote yourself body and soul and life to the holiest Cause now on earth, the cause before which all therest sinks into insignificance. Leave that prison which you call your home, and come to me your truest friend and safest love! With me your life will be happy and honourable, with any one else it will be ruined!"

Her passionate emotion gained on the girl so far that she returned her caress with gratitude and affection.

"If I do leave home at all, Bell, I will come to you," she said.

"Strike hands on it!" cried Bell, holding her still tightly clasped.

But she started back and withdrew herself as suddenly as if Perdita had been a burning coal when the door softly opened and sharp-faced, mouse-like Connie stole noiselessly into the room.

"Congratulate me, congratulate yourself and her, my Con!" said Bell after a moment's quick breath and something more like an abashed silence and the look of having been 'caught,' than one would have expected from the Champion of her Sex. "Her people have put on the screw a little too tight this time, and the dear creature will break through it all and will come to us!"

"Grand news!" said Constance with a sickly

smile and a nervous quiver of her eyelids. "And when will she come?"

"Ay! when?" repeated Bell, who by this time had regained her usual smooth self-possession.

"I do not know, I must see what they mean to do at home," answered Perdita shrinking back, feeling as if she were being forcibly thrust into deep waters which gave no foothold, and which she could not breast if once in them.

"Whatever they may do, your way is clear and your promise given," repeated Bell, her face all aflame. "Liberty—you want liberty, sympathy, your rights—here you shall have them all. I cannot believe you will be so mad as to refuse the chance."

"No, not if I am pushed to it," said Perdita; but there was no ring of pleasure in her voice and her big eyes grew dark and humid as she spoke. "And now I must go," she said nervously. "I have been here too long, and I shall get scolded if I am late."

"It is before you to have a life where you never will be scolded," said Bell.

Perdita smiled faintly and without any heart or vitality in her smile; but Bell kissed her fondly, and led her to the door with extreme consideration; saying "A bientôt!" as she left and kissing her hand to her from the door-step.

"You are throwing yourself away on her, Bell!" said Connie, so soon as Perdita had gone. "She will never be one of us. She is in love!"

"God bless my heart and soul, Con!" cried Bell with a start. "In love, you little owl!—how can she be in love? And with whom, pray, Mrs. Wisdom?" contemptuously.

"Leslie Crawford," said Connie tranquilly.

"Oh, I say, this is too strong!—Leslie Crawford? a married man? Oh, come! drop that, Con! That is slander."

"She is," said Constance. "I saw it at the Hall that night as plainly as I ever saw anything in my life; and that explains why she does not jump at such an offer as yours."

"Yes," said Bell, as if suddenly enlightened, tapping her front teeth with her thumb-nail; "that would, as you say, explain everything. I'll see to the bottom of this, Con, and if I find that it is so, I'll denounce her to her mother. May I never see to-morrow if I do not; but for the present, little woman, excuse me if I hesitate and take the liberty to doubt."

"You will find I am right," said Constance with a certain prim tenacity for which she was famous. "I can see through things of this kind at a glance."

It was quite dusk when Perdita reached home. Her meeting with Bell Blount had cost her an hour's valuable time, exposed her to suspicion, to the certainty of cross-examination and the consequent certainty of rebuke; and had done no real good. For she had by no means resolved on

leaving home without making another effort to induce her mother to let her live her own life and keep her own friends; and, certainly, if she had to leave for the one part on account of Bell, she would not give up the Crawfords. It was all a dreadful confusion, and she was miserably sorry. But then she always was sorry about something, and it seemed if as she would never be anything else. Life to her was a cleft stick; and she knew no power by which to free herself.

Thinking of her difficulties and seeing no issue, she walked rapidly homewards, coming to the house at the same moment as the postman. He had a letter in his hand.

"I will take it for you," said Perdita good-naturedly, to save him the trouble of the delivery.

"Thank you, miss," he answered, giving it to her and passing on.

It was for Eva, and as Perdita went up the steps, conning the address as was natural, the dining-room blind moved and Eva's face which had been pressed against the window was withdrawn. Immediately after the door was opened by Eva herself—the first time in her life that the child had ever shown so much grace to "funny old Per."

"Oh, Eva, here is a letter for you," said the unconscious blunderer as she came into the hall. "I took it from the postman. What an odd mincing little handwriting!"

"Give it to me, and don't scream so!" said Eva impatiently as to spirit, softly as to volume and tone. "What a voice you have, Perdita! It is like a bellman's!" she added, as she took the letter from her sister and ran up stairs with her hand in the pocket of her dress and the paper crushed between her fingers. "What a nuisance that Perdita is!" she thought to herself, grinding her pretty little teeth with rage. "She is always getting in the way. Fancy her coming up just as the postman came and taking this letter! I dare not tell her to hold her tongue; and she is such a great stupid thing, she is as likely as not to say something about it to mother or Thomasina. How I wish she would go away! It would be far jollier without her."

By the time she had formed all these thoughts in her head, her feet had carried her to her own room, where, locking herself in, she lighted the gas and sat down to her perilous pleasure — the letter which Bois-Duval had told her in his little note of Saturday night to look out for by the six o'clock post on Monday. It was a rash thing to do; and she was half angry that he had exposed her to such a danger; but as no harm had come of it, she could afford to forgive him and revel undisturbed in the delight of his delicious flatteries.

If Thomasina could have divined that at this moment her little sister was reading an impassioned

prayer from Bois-Duval to meet him to-morrow afternoon in Kensington Gardens, by the sixth tree on the left hand side of the Broad Walk! But as stone walls have no tongues and the sharpest eyes cannot look through deal doors, there was no chance of discovery if only that stupid old Per would hold her tongue.

In the hope that Perdita would be too dull and silent to chatter—and if Eva could prevent untimely words by her own abounding flow she would—the little one put in a few extra touches, which made her look surpremely lovely, and which she knew would predispose Mumsey to any extent in her favour. All through dinner she was as sweet as any nightingale singing among the roses; delightfully caressing to her mother; prettily submissive to Ina; even humane and forbearing to that funny old Per who was as downcast as she was excited—downcast, so that she was like a death's head as the table, as Mrs. Winstanley said to Thomasina fretfully.

The direct consequence, however, of Eva's extraordinary animation was, so far as Thomasina was concerned, to make her watch her little sister quietly from under those finely-drawn level brows of hers, asking herself: "What does it mean? and what naughtiness has she been doing or is she going to do?"

By which she proved that elder sisters are clear-sighted when mothers are sometimes blind;

and that extreme amiability may be an indiscretion where concealment is more necessary than admiration.

Still, the evening passed away without any mishap; and Eva with her gaiety, Perdita with her sadness, worked through the hours that lay between dinner and bedtime without anything said that should betray the secret thoughts of either. As they were taking their candles and wishing each other good-night, Mrs. Winstanley hesitated for a moment whether she should speak to Perdita and ask if she had obeyed her commands or no; but, finally, she determined to leave things alone till something should happen to which she could not shut her eyes; and with Perdita's uncomfortable nature the mother felt very sure that she would not have to wait long. Meanwhile her debts were pressing and she had grave reasons for dreading the near future.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE.

THEY were all in it; the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker; every tradesman of every denomination; they were on her like so many hounds slipped from the leash, and no one held aloof from pity because she was a widow with three daughters to marry, or for respect because she was a

lady and had inherited the purple. On the contrary, these vulgar persons held the interests of their own families before those of their handsome, well-dressed, soft-spoken debtor; and they said, in their rude way, that if she could not pay she ought not to buy; that, cutting a coat according to the cloth being one of the elemental moralities of a commercial society, if she had not enough for a cloak she could content herself with a jacket; and that if she could not be fine and honest too, she ought to be simple and let finery go to the deuce. They had to pay for what they had, they said: and by—a great many strange gods; but then they were only vulgar trades-people—she should be made to pay too.

It was the day of reckoning and she was without the means to meet the score. Her debts had closed round her like a net; and she looked in vain for the mouse which should gnaw the cord and deliver her from its toils.

As a rule she kept her troubles to herself, but to-day she did not feel able to bear unassisted such a heavy burden as she was dragging on her well-dressed back; so she took Thomasina into her confidence and laid the whole state of things before her.

If any one could help her, it was this wise eldest daughter who never seemed to be overcome nor frightened nor to lose her presence of mind nor to be swept away by passion of any kind;

but who was always serviceable and quiet and strong in one.

"It is but right that you should know the truth, my dear," said Mrs. Winstanley, when she had finished her uncomfortable story. "You are no longer a child: and I pay your good sense a compliment in taking you into my confidence."

"Yes, mother," answered Thomasina. "It is very good of you to associate me with your troubles. I would rather know the exact state of things than not. We can then talk more freely together and discuss the best plan for getting out of our difficulties."

"If any one can hit upon a good way, it will be you, Thomasina," said her mother. After a pause she asked, as if it were a thought that had just occurred to her: "How would it do to ask Mr. Brocklebank for a loan? he owes me something on account of Perdita," bitterly.

"I will manage Mr. Brocklebank," answered Thomasina, also after a pause. "He will come here to-day, and I will see him alone; unless you object, dear mother?"

Mrs. Winstanley held out her hand, tears were in her eyes.

"God bless you, my dear girl!" she said. "You are the best daughter that ever mother had!"

"Thank you, dear mother," said Thomasina, flinging her arms round her mother's neck with what was for her a strange outburst of feeling.

"I love no one in the world as I love you; and I would give up everything, do anything that I possibly could, to give you pleasure or spare you anxiety. I care more for your happiness than for anything else in life!"

Mrs. Winstanley sighed.

"If only your poor sister Perdita were as wise and satisfactory!" she said with genuine regret. "If she, like you, had put her intellect into learning life as it is, instead of letting herself go headlong into all her wicked follies, what a comfort to us she might have been! As things are I cannot trust her. If she had the most brilliant opening made for her, the most glorious position offered to her, I doubt her acceptance of it—she is so wrong-headed, so intensely obstinate and wrong-headed!" she added with impatience, thinking of Mr. Brocklebank, of his strange hesitation among the three, and of Perdita's chances, quite as good as Thomasina's but so impossible to be calculated on because of that stubborn and reprehensible eccentricity.

"Yes," said Thomasina; "if she had chosen the line of social cleverness she would have made a grand success. It was a thousand pities that she did not see this. She is very good, very much in earnest; but of course by her opinions and all that, she has cut the ground from under her own feet and hindered herself from being of any use to the rest of us."

And she too sighed in concert with her mother; but as neither sighing nor regrets could make a better job of the rebel than she had chosen to make of herself, they let the uncongenial subject drop, and Thomasina went upstairs to think out her plan of action alone.

Things looked black enough. All the well-laid schemes had gone agley; and of the compact-looking web of future possibilities only one disastrous and one uncertain strand remained. The marriage of Hubert Strangways was now publicly announced for the first week in November; Sir James Kearney was in Paris—so was Mrs. Merton; Benjamin Brocklebank was always the huge, heavy humming-bird moth, ever poising and never settling; and that dreadful Bois-Duval was in London for no good! For whatever cause he had come, Thomasina knew it was for no good! Mother had not included him in the list of her worries, but she, Thomasina, had thought about him ever since Saturday night when they had met him at the theatre; and Eva's prettiness and gaiety last evening had set her thinking still more. And then those dreadful debts! What an awful position for poor darling mother, who did all she could for them! It was only for them, and to get them well married, that she had got into her present difficulties; and of course it was their duty to do all they could for her in return. What they ought to do was to reward her by marrying well; and for her own

part the Winstanley eldest was quite prepared to do her duty in that way. But the chance seemed rather remote at the present moment; and thinking of husbands in the clouds would not help mother out of her difficulties, with her angry creditors at the door. How these were to be staved off or satisfied was the question of the hour; and one which had to be solved at any cost.

Thomasina matured her plans. She prepared the statement that she intended to make to Mr. Brocklebank, and the discourse that she would hold with him as well as she could without the interlocutor to take up her cues. Then she dressed herself afresh, with extra care and supreme refinement, and did not even disdain artful little touches of pink and white and black where she thought they would tell and would not be revealed; after which she placed herself in the most favourable spot of the pleasantly subdued drawing-room—waiting until the ironmaster should call.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Winstanley went out with Eva; and Eva, taken with a sudden desire for autumn tints and falling leaves, besought her mother to go into the Garden and feed the ducks on the Serpentine.

As Thomasina expected, the ironmaster did call; and she had the field to herself.

Nothing in the Winstanley eldest was ever caricatured or exaggerated. The highest charm of her manner was its sameness of tranquillity;

and in all circumstances and under all conditions she was ever quiet, well-bred and decorously amiable. To-day her manner was just as exquisitely delicate in tone as ever; and yet there was a certain differ ence – a certain increase of gentleness that touched upon melancholy—a certain sweet sad note that ran through the harmonies of her voice like the faintest echo of pain. And faint though it all was, Benjamin Brocklebank, the unaesthetic iron-master, caught it—as it was meant he should.

"Miss Winstanley does not seem in her usual buoyant spirits to-day," he said after a while, looking at her critically.

Now buoyancy of spirits was certainly not Thomasina's characteristic; but it did as well as anything else for the moment.

"No," she answered; and then she paused, looked down and seemed to reflect.

Mr. Brocklebank's deep-set eyes were still fixed on her. He saw that something was wrong; that some stone had stirred the quiet waters of that still yet not transparent lake; but his was not the vision that could penetrate the depths and see what went on beneath the surface.

"I may as well open my heart to you," then said Thomasina, looking up into the ironmaster's face. "You are so good to us all; so true a friend to the family; and women are so helpless by themselves! I want you to help me, Mr. Brockle-bank, as you helped Perdita. Get me something

to do by which I may earn money! Mother has received very bad news. She has lost a large sum of money by some investment; I do not know what; and I want to help her if I can!"

"Miss Winstanley feels and thinks as I should have expected she would—with perfect propriety," said the ironmaster admiringly. "But the difficulty will be to find any employment that one so delicate can undertake to perform. Miss Perdita is of a robuster make; but what can a lily-lady like Miss Winstanley accomplish?"

"Every one has his or her proper sphere of usefulness," said Thomasina with the sweetest air of pious philosophy. "There must be something for me to do, if I only knew what!"

"We must get you well married, my dear," said Mr. Brocklebank with startling familiarity. "That is Miss Winstanley's rôle," he added, going back on his old manner of cautious formality.

Thomasina raised her lovely eyes and looked at the window as if interrogating the skies behind the blind. She sighed gently.

"I could not marry merely for a settlement," she said, slowly leaving the heavens and fixing her calm limpid eyes on the hard face before her. "I would do anything in the whole world for mother, but this; and——"

"And there is no one then at this moment for whom you have conceived any regard?" he interrupted, speaking brusquely and naturally.

The faintest colour came into the pure pale cheeks—the faintest quiver of embarrassment round the thin quiet lips. Then the girl smiled and bent her swan-like throat into a graceful curve and made a slight movement with her hand as though to ward off an inadmissible subject; and again turned her eyes to the skies behind the blind.

"This is quite beside the matter," she said gently. "What I want now, dear Mr. Brocklebank, is to help my mother in her difficulty, and to make some money as soon as I can. Indeed, if I cannot, I do not know what will become of her and us!" she added, her beautiful eyes filling with genuine tears.

"Tut! tut! never say die!" said Mr. Brocklebank with that kind of jocose sympathy which grates on the nerves of people in trouble more than either grave opposition or serious rebuke. "We will find some stile, no doubt, for the little pig to get over—some turning in the long lane! I own I should not like to see my amiable friends incommoded; and if Mrs. Winstanley will allow me I will go into her affairs conscientiously and carefully and see what salvage can be gathered out of the wreck. As a man of business I may be of use."

"Thank you a thousand times," said Thomasina, with a smile that masked a gasp; "but I do not think that mother will tell you anything, Mr. Brocklebank! The fact is," she said, as if making a sudden surrender of confidence; "we

have been ruined by one who seemed to be our best friend—by a man to whom our father confided us and in whom we have always trusted implicitly. He invested our money badly and we have lost it all! But mother will not betray him even to you, dear Mr. Brocklebank—and I know that she will take no proceedings against him. No! we are in an awfully bad pass; but we must get out of it by ourselves. I can say so much, confidentially."

"Fine feeling but bad business!" said Mr. Brocklebank, shaking his head. "I admire, Miss Winstanley; I admire; but I deprecate!"

"Ah, you do not know mother yet!" said Thomasina. "She is the soul of honour and high-mindedness. She is the essence of all that we mean by the word Lady."

"So I quite believe; and Miss Winstanley's advocacy of her mother commends itself to my heart; but there is justice as well as mercy—self-protection as well as refinement; and the scoundrel ought to be made to refund the money scattered and lost—the property of the widow and the orphans!"

"You must not speak to mother of this," said Thomasina earnestly. "You will only distress her more than she is distressed already. No! that way is barred, Mr. Brocklebank. Ah! what can I do for mother! my poor sweet patient ill-used mother!" she said, clasping her hands with some-

thing of Perdita's favourite gesture, and then throwing herself into an attitude of graceful despair.

Mr. Brocklebank did not speak. He sat with his eyes on the ground, tracing out the pattern of the carpet with his stick. Minutes that seemed like hours to Thomasina passed in this absolute stillness which nothing broke but the ticking of of ormolu on the chimneypiece, the sudden laughter of a passing child, or the yelp of a frightened dog. And still the ironmaster traced with his stick the outlines of the roses and tulips, the poppies and forget-me-nots which formed the pattern of the worn and faded carpet; and still thought and hesitated, pondered and reflected, and weighed moral merit against social fitness, passion against admiration, as he had so often done before, without coming to any clear decision.

At last he looked up. He took Thomasina's hand and carried it to his lips.

"Miss Winstanley may rely on me," he said, his voice a trifle husky. "I will stand the friend of the family now and ever." Then he added abruptly: "Where is Miss Perdita? It is almost time she was at home."

"Yes," said Thomasina, drawing a deep breath of intense relief.

Then she was not to be sacrificed! She had done her duty, but she was not to be made to suffer according to the usual reward of those who stand in the breach and make themselves the

Providence of the afflicted. Mother would be saved and she would not be lost. How good and true this hard-featured man of gold and iron was! He was not lovely—most certainly not lovely—but he was useful, he was solid, he was trustworthy, and to be relied on when reliance was the one thing necessary for salvation. And Perdita would draw the big prize after all. Thomasina thought vaguely something about jewels and snouts;—but that was not her affair. If Benjamin Brocklebank chose to put a shy, awkward red-republican at the head of his table, instead of one who would have made Armour Court the local St. James's, the minor Versailles, that was his affair, no other person's. Hers was the joy of having brought matters to a head so that her beloved mother should be delivered from the cruel fangs of her creditors—with a silent Te Deum on her own account.

"I think I will go and meet Miss Perdita," then said Mr. Brocklebank, rising. "She must come up High Street, I imagine?"

"Yes," answered Thomasina; "she generally comes through the Gardens, then by Long Lane and so into High Street. You will probably meet mother and Eva too. They said they would come home to five o'clock tea, and it is past five now."

"I will go in search of my family," returned Mr. Brocklebank with profound gravity; and after again kissing Thomasina's hand, he took up his

hat and carried himself and his projects out of the house in search of the flint on which to strike the steel.

He walked slowly through High Street and Long Lane, and so to the great gate of the Gardens opposite the Broad Walk; but he saw nothing of Perdita, nor of Mrs. Winstanley, nor yet of little Eva under the maternal wing. It was vexing and chilling. The ironmaster had made up his mind; and he did not like his resolutions to get cool. It was a word and a blow with him; and as soon as he had heated his iron he liked to make his horse-shoe. For the second time within three days Perdita had made him wait; and had he been as clear-sighted in affairs of the heart as he was in those of the market, he would have known how far he had gone by the irritation which his disappointment caused him.

While he was hesitating at the Great Gate, asking himself whether he should go in and walk on till he met her, or bear back to No. 100, a clear bird-like voice struck on his ear, and Eva, gay as a lark, bright as a sunbeam, fresh as a rose, came through a side avenue, every now and then turning back to speak to her mother walking immediately behind her, accompanied by the dark-haired foreigner who had spoken to them at the theatre—M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval.

He had met them by the purest accident in

the Gardens and he had joined them as of course, said Mrs. Winstanley to the substantial friend in an aside; and she, feeling that it was only her duty to repay some of the hospitality of attention which he had shown them in his own country, had allowed him to join them in their walk. From all that she had heard, he was a most exemplary young man, she added, taking Mr. Brocklebank into her confidence—a man of good old family, with a fine estate on the borders of Spain; and altogether one whose acquaintance was more desirable than not. She was a most careful mother, she went on to say in the quiet undisturbed way of a sister consulting with a brother—but she could not deny her daughters all the acquaintances which were never meant to include marriage. And on this she smiled and looked up into Mr. Brocklebank's face as if a joke had passed between them of which this was the echo.

Then said Mr. Brocklebank, his mind suddenly illumined as if by a flash of lightning:

"Is this the gentleman who crossed swords with Mr. Hubert Strangways not so long ago?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Winstanley with a simplicity that would have done credit to Eva. "Two hot-headed boys as they were! But I am happy to say that no harm has come of it. Mr. Strangways is fast recovering, and the Vicomte is so sorry, so penitent! Do you know I think it will be a lesson to him, Mr. Brocklebank. I devoutly

hope it may. This horrid habit of duelling—it ought to be abolished by the law; and from what the Vicomte has said, and judging by his contrition, this will be his last duel as I believe it has been his first."

"Madam," said Mr. Brocklebank severely, "our great lexicographer propounded that a man who makes a pun would pick a pocket, and I affirm that a man who fights a duel would commit a murder. He is a murderer in heart and is not to be admitted inside a thoughtful Christian's house. These are my sentiments; and Mrs. Winstanley must forgive me if I express strongly what I feel deeply. This gentleman has done his best to extinguish the vital spark in one of your friends, and in my humble opinion, madam, you ought to turn a cold shoulder on him and never let him within the sacred precincts of your home. My advice may not be worth much, but such as it is, there it is!"

"Your advice is worth everything to me," said Mrs. Winstanley. "I look on you as our best friend."

"You are right, madam," answered the ironmaster; "I am your best friend, and will prove it. Where is Miss Perdita?"

Ah, where indeed!

"Is she not at home? You have come from my house, you say?" asked the mother.

"Mrs. Winstanley has divined rightly. I have

come from her house, but I did not say so," answered Benjamin Brocklebank. "I have had a charming conversation with Miss Winstanley—a most interesting, and what I may call intimate conversation; but Miss Perdita had not returned when I left, and I came here in the hopes of meeting her on her way home."

"I, too, expect her every moment," said Mrs. Winstanley, who had not thought of her until now—looking vaguely round corners where Perdita could not by any chance appear. "It is time she was at home."

"Time you were all at home," said Mr. Brocklebank irritably. "These evening damps and chills play Old Harry with one's bronchial tubes."

"Yes, let us go," said Mrs. Winstanley. "Eva, my child, we must go home now at once."

Eva started from a whispered talk with Bois-Duval. They had been standing behind the backs of the mother and the family friend—he beseeching, she neither refusing nor granting; playing with fire, tempting the deluge, excited by his passion, spurred on by her own coquetry and that pleasant form of vanity which stood with her for love. The mother's voice broke in on this talk just as she was pressed into a corner whence she could not retreat.

"I think I will return with my friends," then said Mr. Brocklebank uneasily. "Miss Perdita may have returned home by another way. We may

find her safely ensconced beneath the parental roof."

"Yes," said Mrs. Winstanley; "in all probability we shall."

She turned to Bois-Duval with a bow of dismissal. He caught the hint, took off his hat, made an elaborate reverence and said "Adieu, Mesdames" as tranquilly as if he had not just now been beseeching Eva to grant him the happiness of his life—to dispense with forms and witnesses and conventional rubbish of all kinds, and to run off with him to Paris, to be made his lovely and beloved little bride. Then the three went home where they found Thomasina in her usual graceful quietude, but no Perdita. Where was she? Where could she be? It was long past the hour of her rightful return; and even if her mother had not been uneasy on her account, Mr. Brocklebank's irritation would have made her so on his.

Where could the girl be? What on earth was she about? It was disgraceful!--unbearable!—and just on this afternoon, of all the afternoons in the week, when something was evidently in the air, and it was of such vital importance to have everything smooth and straight.

Mrs. Winstanley had to use all her self-command not to say to Mr. Brocklebank crudely: "See to what your horrible office life and independent running about the streets leads girls!" But she refrained. She looked at Thomasina; Thoma-

sina looked at her; but neither could say where this tiresome and upsetting rebel was.

The minutes dragged on, surely never so leaden-footed—never so slowly! The quarters chimed; the half-hours struck; dinner-time was at hand; and still Mr. Brocklebank stayed and still no Perdita appeared. The thing was becoming serious. Where was she? What could have become of her?

"Oh this horrible work, this dangerous liberty of English girls!" at last said Mrs. Winstanley, unable to bear the strain of the situation longer.

Mr. Brocklebank looked grave.

"Miss Perdita must be admonished," he said severely; while Thomasina felt as if the marble palace which she had built with so much care care had melted into thin air, and the solid globe of gold which she thought she had tossed into her mother's lap had proved to be nothing but an iridescent bubble thrown off by the foam of the sea—and now burst and broken for ever.

CHAPTER X.

THE CRAWFORD SKELETON.

THE private door stood open and the maid was on the threshold looking anxiously down the street, as if watching for some one to appear. As soon

as Perdita came in sight she ran to meet her, saying:

"Please, miss, will you come in? Missis is very bad and wants to see you."

Perdita needed no second invitation. With a little exclamation she went into the house and ran upstairs as one to whom the place was free. In the drawing-room she found Mrs. Crawford sitting on the sofa, her face turned inward to the cushions, weeping piteously. Leslie sat by her, holding one of her hands in his; but though his face was sad no tears were in his eyes, nor in his manner was there evidence of more acute distress, more profound melancholy than that which always clung to him. There was no more than the ordinary cloud, whatever that might be, which had evidently darkened the sunshine of his life and given him the chilled and reticent air of one who has something to hide and all to bear; but he seemed to pity his mother and to feel for her, if not for himself.

"Here she is!" he said, as Perdita came into the room; his words showing that they had been talking of and expecting her. "Now I shall leave you together. She will comfort you best alone, mother."

He rose from his seat; bending over the poor weeping woman he whispered a few kindly words and kissed that part of her cheek which was not hidden in the pillow; then going up to Perdita he held out both his hands, looking into

her face almost as if he were asking her some question.

But he did not speak; and she was too much moved by Mrs. Crawford's anguish to have much consciousness left for herself.

"What is the matter?" she asked in a low voice, aghast at this strange breakdown, this passionate despair from one usually so calm and self-controlled as her Quaker-like friend.

"She will tell you herself," said Leslie; "it is best that you hear it from her. I shall see you before you leave?" he added. "When the mother has told you what she wishes you to know, I will take you home. But now I will leave you."

Perdita visibly trembled. To one of her keen imagination, mysteries, secrets, revelations, were terribly exciting. They overpowered her better judgment and made her fear she did not know what. That some mystery was in this quiet middle-class tradesman's family she had dimly seen from the first. She forgot it as time went on and she became better acquainted with the mother and son and more at her ease in the house; but when she cared to reflect she always knew there was something. And now she was to hear the truth and learn the name of the family skeleton whose presence she had discerned though she had not traced out its form. That wife, who was neither living nor dead, never seen yet not disowned nor

in her grave; Leslie's undeclared sadness; his tenderness to his mother, showing so much feeling in his nature and his indifference to his child showing as much unnatural coldness; Mrs. Crawford's reserve on all facts relating to her daughter-in-law, mingled with the exaggerated intensity of her affection for one who after all was but her son's wife—yes!—there was evidently something to be told! Bell Blount had said: "If you knew all about them you would not care for them so much," and now the moment had come when she was to know all about them, and be taken behind the scenes and shown things as they were.

No wonder that she trembled, sensitive and imaginative as she was!—no wonder that, with her strange power of living in the lives of others and her dangerous tendency to enlarge the borders of fact by fancy, she felt as if the crisis of her own fate had come! She looked up into Leslie's face, her own scared and white.

"I am sorry you are in trouble," she said simply and earnestly; to which he answered: "Yes, I know you are," as simply and earnestly for his own part.

"Dearest Mrs. Crawford! how sorry I am!" the girl began, taking Leslie's chair as he left the room. She kissed the delicate hand that hung so nervelesssy across the bent knees and held it to her soft warm cheek as if that would comfort the grieving soul. "What is it? what can I do to

help you?" she continued, her voice as tender as a caress.

"Nothing! nothing!" said Mrs. Crawford despairingly; and Perdita, echoing the word, thought to herself: Why then was she wanted? If she could do no good, why had they wanted her, looked out for her, and told her to come in?

"Yes, dear, I can do something, for I love you," she said gently. "We can always help those we love."

"I have not helped the one whom I loved!" said Mrs. Crawford, with a fresh burst of weeping. Then she raised her face and took Perdita to her bosom. "I have lost her!" she said: "my dear, dear child is dead!"

"Dead!" echoed Perdita, with a cry as if stunned; "little Lily dead!"

"No, no!" said Mrs. Crawford; "not my Lily—her mother—my poor, sweet, unhappy girl!"

"Leslie's wife?" asked Perdita, in a low voice.

She was pale and frightened, and seemed somehow as if standing among quicksands where she was sure of nothing.

"Yes, his wife and my dear, dear daughter," said Mrs. Crawford with fresh tears.

The girl shivered as if a rude wind had passed over her. She was strangled, suffocated, though she could not have said why, save for sympathy with Mrs. Crawford's distress. For indeed she was essentially sympathetic and easily moved by the

sight of sorrow. And this was a terribly painful moment. The motherless child, the bereaved mother, the desolate husband;—and yet he was not desolate! Only the woman grieved and the child was motherless; the man possessed his soul in calmness.

"She did not know me!" cried Mrs. Crawford, wringing her hands. "She did not know me!" she repeated. "All yesterday and last night up to two o'clock to-day, when she died, I held her in my arms. She died in my arms—her sweet, pretty head on my bosom where she had lain when a little child—and she never once called me 'Mother;' never once recognized me! She called for me while I was there, but refused to believe that it was her own true loving mother who held her! My daughter! my dear, dear daughter! Oh, Perdita, my child, God keep you from such suffering as I have gone through for her!"

"My poor darling!—oh, how I pity you!" said Perdita in a low voice. "But what was it? was it fever? why did she not know you?" she asked, with the natural curiosity of sympathy. One must know what one has to pity and be sorry for?

"She had lost her reason for the last two years," said Mrs. Crawford. "And she died without recovering it."

This, then, was the mystery; this the shape

of the skeleton! Leslie's wife, little Lily's mother, a maniac—dying in some place away from home and mad to the last! And Leslie was not broken-hearted; though the mother was.

"How dreadful!" said Perdita with a sob half of terror, half of pity. "Poor, poor mother!"

There was something in the girl's tender voice, her loving touch, her genuine warmth and sympathy which touched and soothed the poor mother's heart. Mrs. Crawford was before all things a mother; and her instincts had followed the natural course of her age. What she most desired and most felt the want of in her present life was the companionship of a grown-up daughter. She longed to have about her a girl, still young but no longer a child, whom she might gently sermonize and lovingly admonish, yet whose advice she could ask and whose help she could claim at every turn, relying on her in reality while assuming her to be still in leading-strings. Her little grandchild was her pleasure, her delight, her darling; but she wanted that grandchild's mother as the link between the generations. She wanted her daughter—or, if that were now impossible, then a daughter, no matter what might be the name of the mother who had borne her!

"Dear girl! my dear Perdita! you must be my daughter now!" she said, drawing the girl to her lips and kissing her forehead.

"I will!" said Perdita, kneeling down by her

and putting her arms round her waist, while she looked up into the poor pained face with her soft eyes full of tears and her whole honest soul shining through them.

"God bless you!" said Mrs. Crawford, pressing her to her heart.

After this a soothing kind of silence fell between them. The elder woman got back by silent prayer some of her usual self-control, and Perdita felt as if she could have dedicated her life to the task of making Mrs. Crawford forget that she had lost one daughter in the possession of another.

Presently Mrs. Crawford spoke.

"I have told you so much, my dear, I will tell you all," she began. "Half confidences are both useless and unfriendly. Better, tell all or nothing. To begin with, did you know that Leslie is my nephew, not my son?"

"No," said Perdita, startled; "I always thought he was your own son."

"No," she sighed; "he is my brother's son; but I brought him up from his babyhood and he married my daughter. Something went wrong—I cannot tell what it was—but some terrible split came between them. I cannot blame Leslie; for I know nothing in which he is to blame; and I cannot blame *her*." Here she wept again. "She was goodness and sweetness in person—a little giddy, perhaps; but then she was so young—and

youth will be heedless! But there it was--a something which was like death between them, and which came on a little before the birth of Lily. From that time Leslie was never the same to her nor she to him. He was not unkind, but he suddenly seemed to have grown ten years older, and stern and shut up; and she was frightened of him. Once she came to me and said, "Oh, mamma, what a fool I was to tell him!" But she would never say what it was that she had told him. I asked Leslie, but he commanded me so sternly never to allude to the subject again that I saw he was not to be trifled with; and I never did. Three days after the birth of Lily she had fever and lost her head. Nothing could be done with her. We kept her as long as we could, but we were at last obliged to put her into an asylum where she died to-day. She had been ill only four days. When you called here on Saturday, and I was so unhappy, that was the first I had heard of her illness. I had seen her that day; but my presence excited and made her worse, and the doctors would not let me stay. Only yesterday, when all hope was over and she had sunk into a kind of torpor, only then did they let me keep with her. But she died without knowing me! If only she had recognized me once! She never did. Just at the last she opened her eyes and said, 'Leslie, forgive me!' She knew him, but she did not know her mother!"

And again the poor woman broke down into weeping as if she would weep her very life away.

"Was Leslie there?" asked Perdita, after the burst had a little subsided.

"Yes; he came early in the morning and stayed with her. When she said those last words he bent over her and kissed her and said, 'I forgive you, Florence. God in His mercy forgive you too!' But what was there to forgive? It is that which breaks my heart! What had my child done that was wrong? It could not have been anything bad; and yet Leslie is so gentle and patient and liberal —he would not have made a grave matter of a mere indiscretion, and at such a moment formally and solemnly have forgiven her. What was it? what could it be?"

But what she did not know Perdita could not divine; and the two beat the air in vain.

"And now you shall be my child," said Mrs. Crawford. "I will be to you as a mother, guiding, correcting, encouraging you in the right way; and you shall be to me as a daughter."

"Yes," said Perdita, with the solemnity of a vow.

"You must come and see me as often as you can—that is, if your own natural mother does not object," said Mr. Crawford with a sudden remembrance of this possible obstacle.

"Yes, I will," answered Perdita again, ignoring the reservation. Whether mother objected or

not she would continue to see the Crawfords; and without the internal combat, the moral doubts, which made loyalty to Bell Blount so difficult. It was a living, human, urgent duty that bound her to this desolate mother; and to desert her in her hour of need for no better reason than because Leslie kept a shop—no! that she would not do! She would despise herself too much were she to give in to such a contemptible snobbishness of caste. Humanity was before these wretched conventionalisms! Truth and love and goodness and carrying comfort to the afflicted—all stood higher than that miserable little barrier—the profession of a retail trader! Had Leslie been 'wholesale' he might have had the friends and connexions of royalty in his counting-house; being 'retail,' he was beyond the pale of social salvation; and his personal gifts were not suffered to count. But with Perdita they should count; and mother must give way. She had made up her mind not to give them up, and mother need not ask her. So determined this wicked rebel in her own mind; daring to draw out a moral programme for herself and to put her individual love and conscience in place of the world's law and filial obedience. Which is not saying that she did right, but only that it was a difficult moral position in which she found herself—between her mother's commands on the one side and her own belief in what was right on the other.

It was now quite dark and the hour was late; but Perdita woke to the knowledge of how time was passing only when Leslie came upstairs to warn her that she must be going home.

"I will take you," he said quietly; and she assented without resistance. It seemed quite right and natural that he should walk with her through the streets and speak to her as if he had something to say. And yet—and yet—there was a strange confusion in her own heart which she could not disentangle. His marriage—his misunderstanding with his wife—her ghastly fate and tragic end—his mother no longer his mother but merely his aunt and his wife's mother—his freedom from all bonds and his evident want of natural sorrow in in their painful breaking—his manner to herself only so late ago as Saturday:—what did it all mean? The whole thing was an entanglement and a puzzle; she understood neither herself nor him, neither what was nor what had been.

But she knew that she loved Mrs. Crawford; and for the present that was enough.

"The mother has told you our sad history, I suppose," he asked as soon as they were alone.

"Yes," she answered; and she added impulsively: "I did not believe you could have been so cruel and unfeeling, Mr. Crawford!"

He looked into the flushed face which she had turned to him with candid reprobation.

"No," he said quietly. "I have not been cruel,

Miss Winstanley. To save the mother, who has been like my own and whose heart it would have broken had she known the truth, I have endured in silence the greatest wrong that a wife can do to her husband; and I have accepted the consequences without taking the world into my confidence or appealing for relief to the law. Never mind the story. You do not understand me, I know. All I want is that you should believe in me. I have not been cruel. Say that yo believe this," he repeated with emotion.

"When you speak to me, I believe you—every word you say," said Perdita; "but the story as it stands seems so much against you, Mr. Crawford."

"No, not as it stands—as it appears to stand," he answered. "I cannot say more; and I will never say more than this. I wish to cast no stones against the erring dead, but for myself, for my honour, my happiness, my future, for you—yes, for you, Perdita—I must have your blind belief, your absolute faith!"

They were walking in the shadow of the street. Suddenly he stopped and faced her.

"I must have you trust in me!" he repeated in a low voice. "It is the last great good left me."

He took both her hands as he had done before, and drew them up to her breast looking at her as if he would read her soul. His eyes, his

voice, were as a revelation to Perdita. The thing was clear if the circumstances were obscure. Whoever might have sinned he had not; and wherever the fault might lie, it was not on his head.

"I do believe you!" she said, turning to him in her old way of self-surrender. "I am sure you have done no wrong!"

He gave a deep sigh and held her hands still closer to him, bending his face nearer and nearer to hers. Suddenly he seemed to check himself in some impulse. He let her hands fall, straightened himself as if on parade and in a cold constrained voice said only: "Thank you."

Then they walked on again—he saying softly to himself something which she was half afraid to hear.

As they turned up West Hill Gardens, they met, carelessly sauntering along as any other indifferent person might have sauntered through the street, M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval, examining the bearings and taking stock of local possibilities. His sharp eyes made out Perdita at a glance, and he lifted his hat with an odd smile. Those sharp eyes made out her companion too; and the smile changed in character, but still continued a smile, as he repeated the salute, and this time took in Leslie Crawford.

"Good God! do you know that infamous scoundrel?" cried Leslie in a voice that made Perdita start.

"He is a friend of mother's—she made his acquaintance at Trouville, and we saw him at the theatre on Saturday night," she answered.

"You must not know him, Perdita! You must not! Give me your sacred word that you will not!" cried Leslie, moved to strange passion. "He is the most hateful scoundrel, the most unredeemed blackguard under heaven, and my worst enemy. It was he who ruined my home and destroyed my happiness."

"Parbleu!" said Bois-Duval to himself, shrugging his shoulders as he passed, "the combination is droll! The excellent grocer and the little one's sister *bras dessous*, *bras dessus*—and the wife—where? For a virtuous young man, *ce cher* Leslie knows how to construe opportunity. But it is evident—these Winstanleys with all their airs of grand ladies are no such great things. If one of them can come home after dark leaning familiarly on the arm of a shopkeeper, I need not afflict myself with scruples!"

And with this he passed on humming gaily; —that wicked rebel little knowing the mischief which she had helped to work by her abominable democracy, in allowing a tradesman of the district to take the footing of an equal and to excite the interest of a friend.

She knew nothing save that she was shocked and bewildered by what Leslie had said; that she longed to tell her mother to shut the doors against

this shameful foreigner who had hurt her friend; that she felt this friend to be more mysterious, more inscrutable than ever, but that she believed in him, respected him, admired him more than ever; that she was pained and pleased, elated and depressed all in one; and that she felt as if she had a talisman hidden somewhere about her heart which would bear her up against the wrath that had to come, when her determination to maintain her relations with Mrs. Crawford was made known to mother and the girls.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOLDEN BALL.

"At last!" said Mr. Brocklebank, as the doorbell rang and Perdita was heard coming up the stairs.

He drew a deep breath and wiped his upper lip, like a man relieved from some great tension; but he squared his shoulders as one who also knew that he had to go through a moment of embarrassment and to perform some kind of heroic feat.

No one spoke; no one called Perdita into the drawing-room on her way upstairs. They let her go in peace, waiting her own time of entrance. She was soon ready for dinner and came hurriedly into the room in the midst of an ominous silence. She herself was pale almost to ghastliness; but she did not look so nervous as usual and her manner

was more assured, her bearing less fluttered, less conscious than in general. It seemed as if the great trouble which she had just witnessed and the words which had been said to her had in some sense steadied and absorbed her, so that she neither saw the cloud impending nor heeded the signs of the outburst.

"My dear Perdita, you are late!" said her mother, when she had come fairly into the room, shutting the door behind her, and standing for a moment a little startled at the sight of Mr. Brocklebank.

He was her own special friend and protector and she was sincerely attached to him; but somehow the sight of him was not so pleasant to her to-day as it had hitherto been, and she felt ill at ease in his presence and wished that he had not been there.

"Yes, I am," she answered, going up to the ironmaster and holding out her hand.

He took it flabbily and without rising from his chair. Though so punctilious and heavily polite in his everyday life, at this moment he wished to show that he was displeased, and that he was the master. It was not necessary that he should pay the girl who had offended the respect due to an ordinary gentlewoman. As his protégée, who had failed in her duty, she must be made to suffer that she might be taught to repent.

"Miss Perdita *is* strangely late," he said in a

dry, hard tone; and Perdita replied as before: "Yes, I am," in a frank one.

There was something in Perdita's odd mixture of frankness and shyness, of hardihood and timidity, which always touched Mr. Brocklebank. He had a little difficulty in keeping up the dignity due to himself when he heard her clear voice and looked into her sensitive face; but he thought it best to frighten her by playing out the character of Offended Master fully. Though he intended to forgive her before the evening was over and to make her happy by all that his forgiveness should include, still, she must be reduced now to sorrow and submission that she might rejoice more completely in her exaltation. Also it was a good opportunity to exert his own authority and to prove to her that he was indeed her master.

"My dear Perdita, what has kept you so long?" asked her mother.

"I will tell you all about it afterwards, mother," she answered, with a little hesitation.

"Am I in Miss Perdita's way? Shall I retire to afford her an opportunity for filial confidence?" interposed Mr. Brocklebank disagreeably.

"Oh, no! no! mother does not mind waiting for what I have to say," answered Perdita, full of belief in the meaning of speech according to its form.

"It is a pity that Miss Perdita should make mysteries out of nothing—what I call mountains

out of molehills," said Mr. Brocklebank. "The confidence between mother and daughters is of course sacred—we all know that!—but friendship has also its claims and a virtuous young lady like Miss Perdita cannot have anything to say, even to her mother, which her friend may not hear."

Perdita looked distressed. The old frightened hunted look came back into her face, and she turned her eyes appealingly to her mother. She turned them to a blank wall. Mrs. Winstanley was arranging the ruffle on her sleeve, and had no responsive glance to give to her rebellious daughter; so that she was forced to stand her ground un supported. But she did stand it. It would have seemed a kind of sacrilege to have spoken of the Crawfords to the master of Armour Court. She knew so well beforehand that he would not understand them or herself; that he would condemn her intimacy, ridicule her interest in them, disbelieve what she believed and doubt what she trusted. No! she could not speak of Leslie or his mother to Mr. Brocklebank. It would be hard to have to battle with mother, but impossible to confide in him.

"It is no great secret any way," she said, with an odd kind of shrinking; "but I would rather tell mother alone."

Thomasina moved some of the trumpery bric-à-brac on the table near her, and bent her head to study more closely the æsthetic beauty of a small shell-basket. What an unlucky creature that

sister of hers was! Just when the ground had been prepared for her and the way made smooth, she must needs knock everything to pieces—first, by her folly in being late again to-night as on Saturday night; and then by her obstinacy in not telling Mr. Brocklebank what he wanted to know! Thomasina herself would have let any one die of desire to know that which she chose to keep hidden, but then she would have found a substitute, a semblance of the truth, which would have done as well; and this knowledge of her own immovable reticence and facile tact combined made her find her sister's silence misplaced and this opposition to their friend a mistake, if not something worse.

"It is dinner time, so we have no time for Perdita's weighty confession," said Mrs. Winstanley, forcing a smile while she effected a diversion. "I scarcely like to ask you to share our very simple meal," she continued, with extreme graciousness of manner but with a heart that seemed to have turned into a lump of ice. "A family of ladies as we are, we live so simply! We are on almost nursery diet!" with a well-acted half-playful laugh. "But if you can dine off this nursery fare, I shall be very glad if you will stay."

"I thank Mrs. Winstanley most profoundly," said Mr. Brocklebank with an involuntary shudder, remembering his past experience, the cold entrées and the poisonous wine; "I will not derange her by my unexpected presence at her hospitable board.

I will retire now that I have seen the stray lamb restored to the fold, and I will return when we have all ministered to the cravings of the inner man. Mrs. Winstanley and her amiable young ladies will have refreshed themselves by their simple —shall I call it ethereal?—food; I, as a more muscular animal, will have fortified myself with something grosser. And then, with permission, we will have a pleasant little evening together, when I shall say two or three words to my protégée here in private which will win her mother's approbation:—of that I am confident!—and which will not be unpleasant to my young friend herself. Till then, ladies, your humble servant."

He bowed to each separately, but to Perdita the last and with what he meant to be a tender smile qualified by a reproving shake of the head.

The matter of the dinner was poor, cold, overcooked and insufficient; the manner was silent, preoccupied, agitated. Mrs. Winstanley forbore to either chide or admonish; Thomasina was in an agony of doubt as to Perdita's acceptance when the offer should be made; Eva was too much absorbed by her own affairs to heed those of another; and Perdita was in her turn too much absorbed by Leslie to heed Mr. Brocklebank. No one spoke and only Eva ate with spirit. As yet no emotion had ever blunted those sharp little white teeth of hers, or made the richest corner of the pudding less than welcome and delicious. For the rest—

thunder was in the air; and even those who were not concerned were conscious.

Perdita was not questioned and, not being questioned, she did not tell the story which was the acorn that would break the jar wherein it should be set. She would have begun, *more suo*, the moment Mr. Brocklebank had left the room, and had got as far as:

"Mother, I stayed at the——" when Mrs. Winstanley stopped her.

"Not now, Perdita," she said coldly; "I would rather not hear what you have to say now. We will wait till to-morrow."

Thus things stood in their old places and nothing was moved; and in this odd thundery heavy way the dinner passed till grace was said and the ceremony came to an end. And in due time after Mr. Brocklebank returned and was ushered up into the drawing-room where, what it pleased him to call 'this amiable family,' had reassembled—waiting on events and judgment.

After a little desultory talk, one by one those who were on this occasion supernumeraries left the room with delicacy and without parade. Thomasina was the first to go. She slid away, no one knew how or when. It was as if she had vanished, so quiet and noiseless was her departure. Mrs. Winstanley, unable to efface herself in this vaporous manner, begged for permission to write a letter

down in the dining-room below; and as soon as she had got to the door Eva called out: "Mumsey, darling! I want to speak to you!" She skipped across the room, balancing her arms as if trying to fly according to her favourite gesture, and was on her mother's neck before the door was closed. Thus the three supernumeraries disappeared before Perdita well knew what had happened, or that they had gone at all, and she was left alone with the ironmaster.

And when they were alone. Mr. Brocklebank got up from the chair where he had been sitting and came over to the sofa where she was, placing himself by her with a grave face and a ponderous air, as if he had the world's salvation to propose and insure.

"Miss Perdita distressed her friend," he began, clearing his throat. "She has distressed him twice of late, deeply."

"I am so sorry!" said Perdita, raising her contrite eyes to his face.

He took her hand. She did not withdraw it. Mr. Brocklebank was her friend, her guardian, almost her temporary father. It could not signify whether he took her hand or no.

"I am sure that Miss Perdita would not wish to distress her friend," he said and gave her hand a fervent squeeze.

"Certainly I would not," replied that obtuse

person, returning the pressure with affectionate instinctiveness and molelike blindness.

The heavy face brightened. That long warm nervous hand, with the slender fingers clasped so frankly round his own so rough and hard and hairy, seemed to touch his heart, to fire his blood, to spur his fancy, to make life a boon and the future a glory.

"Then confess and be absolved," he returned with elephantine playfulness. "Where was this charming truant, this naughty delinquent, when she ought to have been safe at home under the maternal wing? hey? Say where, before pardon can be pronounced!"

"I was at a friend's," returned Perdita with a tremor in her voice and love in her eyes.

"So? And what friends has this protégée of mine that I do not know of, and whose existence her mother seems equally unable to divine?"

Perdita hesitated for a moment. She shrank from taking Mr. Brocklebank into her confidence. It hurt her pride in those dear sorrowing friends of hers, to expose their griefs, to explain their condition—that condition so certain to be despised. Yet she was forced by the law of her nature to be candid and sincere; and after all—what was there to conceal?

"They are the Crawfords," she said quite steadily. "He is the chemist in High Street."

Mr. Brocklebank let her hand fall from his.

"No! that is an impossibility—that cannot be endured!" he said warmly. "A young lady like Miss Perdita—delaying the family repast—setting all heads aching for fear of what had become of her—for a chemist in High Street. Gregory and St. James!" he cried—and when he used this adjuration he was in good truth roused—"that I should live to receive such a confession! It cannot—it must not be! Miss Perdita, you must give up these people. You degrade yourself—a young lady like you!—you lower yourself more than I can stand. It is unseemly, it is ugly, it is monstrous!"

"No, I cannot give them up, indeed I cannot!" said Perdita.

"No? what's this I hear? Miss Perdita says No when her friend says Yes? I think my ears have played me a trick!" said Mr. Brocklebank with misgiving.

"They are fond of me and I of them," pleaded Perdita. "And I am of use to them."

Mr. Brocklebank rose and walked about the room. He was more agitated than he could quite understand. Perdita's simplicity of reasoning, so all-sufficient to herself, was without weight with him. She might be of use to them a thousand times, but that created no bond in his mind. If social things were out of gear the human aspect

of a friendship did not count with him any more than with Mrs. Winstanley.

"And I say Yes," he said after a while, coming back to her and again seating himself on the sofa. "I say Yes, Miss Perdita; and I have a right to judge and to ordain."

"You have always been very very good to me; and I owe you gratitude and affection for all that you have done for me," returned Perdita, beginning quietly and ending warmly, "but these are dear friends too, and they have been very good too, and I owe them gratitude and affection as well."

"Not the same as to *me*," said Benjamin Brocklebank; "not the same as to the man who is to be your husband."

Perdita started up, but he took hold of her hand to prevent her running away as she seemed inclined. He raised his face to hers, with a look as if he had done something magnanimous, unanswerable—a look that said: "There now! see to what glory I have destined you—I great Ahasverus and you meek loving Esther!"

"Your husband," he repeated.

But Perdita, snatching away her hands, covered her face and cried out in a terrified voice:

"No! no! Mr. Brocklebank! never! never!" The man's self-confidence was so great, his sense of superiority and mastership so supreme, that he

mistook the girl's renunciation for the expression of joy so deep as to be almost unendurable, so great as to be wholly incredible.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he said reassuring her. "It is true indeed. I have selected you from among the hundreds who will envy you; and you are to be my own, my very own. From the first you pleased me and stirred my mind. Your sisters are delectable, I grant. Miss Winstanley is like a young queen and the little one is sweetness and freshness in person; and I own that at one time I hesitated. But my fancy at last settled itself and Miss Perdita is my final choice. So now let us have no more escapades—no more consorting with chemists and such-like trash—no more making friends of demented-looking females who gyrate in scarlet and call you by familiar epithets of endearment. I must have my Perdita all that the mistress of Armour Court should be, as well as all that she is in herself: and we will begin the new page from this evening—from now when we stand pledged to each other as man and wife!"

"But we are not pledged!" cried Perdita, shrinking back with a scared face. "I cannot say Yes to you, Mr. Brocklebank. It cannot be!"

"You are not, and you are not, and you cannot be? Are you sincere, Perdita, or is this a bad joke—an exaggeration of coyness and maidenly

modesty?" asked Mr. Brocklebank, a look of surprise gradually deepening into fierceness on his face. "You reject me?—and may I ask why?—you reject me as your husband?—you fly from Armour Court?—and may I know the reason why?" he repeated. "When have I offended Miss Perdita Winstanley? She has always been to me as my own ewe lamb; why this sudden tergiversation and repugnance? I thought I was liked in this quarter—have always flattered myself so:—how have the mighty fallen and the secure been deceived!"

"So I do; I like you very much indeed, Mr. Brocklebank," said poor Perdita, with fatal earnestness.

She bent towards him to assure him more completely of her liking. Had it been any one but Perdita, honest, sincere, obtuse, impulsive, the action would have been both a challenge and a caress:—"Very much," she repeated; "but——"

"But what? But me no buts, Miss Perdita; say frankly what there is in your heart."

"I do not love you as a husband! You are my dear friend, but no more than my friend."

His heavy face lightened up into a broad laugh.

"That is all?" he said, taking her hands and swinging them to and fro. "Tut! tut! a mouse's squeak!—not enough to frighten a baby! You will soon learn to love me as a husband, my dear, when I am one. We cannot feel what we do not know, and you are all abroad in your calculations!

You will come to it, my dear, you will come to it! I should have expected this—this pretty coyness, from you, my dear Perdita. It is indeed what I should have preferred had I been asked to make my choice; just what I should have selected as the proper frame of mind in the young lady whom I aspired to make my wife; but coyness is not blockishness, and your want of certain feelings is not absolute refusal to allow them leave to grow. Come! let us get over this little hitch as of no manner of consequence. It is only a straw."

"It is not a straw," said Perdita with energy. She felt as if she were to be taken possession of on the spot and married out of hand; and that she must be candid and firm, else woe would befall her. "I cannot marry you, Mr. Brocklebank. Do not be angry with me! do not be offended! but indeed I cannot!" she repeated.

"And my rival's name?" he asked sternly.

"You have none," she said; but her eager face paled as she spoke. "You have no rival; but I love you only as a father," she added with frightful candour.

He laughed disagreeably and pulled up his shirt-collar.

"A rather young father, even for Miss Perdita," he said. "I am proud of the flattering distinction, but I cannot say I think the cap fits!"

"No, no, not in age," said the poor honest blunderer. "I only mean that I have the same

kind of feeling for you—the same kind of respect and reliance on you, and all that—I don't mean that you are old!"

"Let that pass," he said angrily and majestically; for now he was really wounded. "I do not desire to be made acquainted with silly reasons for an insulting comparison. A lady's reasons indeed are seldom worth the trouble of being made acquainted with! I take my answer. It is 'No'. As a man of honour I have only to retire. I am sorry for this amiable family. I had hoped to have been of service to them. From all I hear Mrs. Winstanley is in a bad way for want of funds; and as Miss Perdita's husband, the purse of the master of Armour Court would have been open to her necessities. That dream of benevolence and help is at an end. Dreams do come to an end in general; and I am a wiser man than I was half an hour ago; but Mrs. Winstanley is a sadder woman, and the Misses Winstanley are all poorer young ladies than they might have been! Miss Perdita had it in her power to redeem her family. She elects to say No; so No be it!"

"I am very very sorry for poor mother," groaned Perdita, clasping her hands; "but what can I do?"

"Do?—what you have done!" he answered brutally. "Say No to your would-be deliverer—reject the proffer of salvation. That is what you have to do, of course! That is the rational action

of a well-conducted young lady and an affectionate daughter! There can be no two opinions on that!"

"Do not be angry with me, Mr. Brocklebank," she pleaded. "You would not have me accept you when I did not love you—would you?" she asked simply.

"I would have had your acceptance and your belief that you would have learned to love me," he answered. "As you would have done. How could you have helped it if you are really heart whole and fancy free? The thing would have come of itself—such a husband as I could have been to you—such settlements as I could have made—and with Armour Court as your place of residence. Am I a hunchback, or old or ugly in any way, that I should disgust you? You *must* have loved me! Gregory and St. James! and the deuce and all! why not?" he said in violent wrath.

"I am so sorry to have vexed you," said Perdita, tears filling her eyes.

"Then cease to be sorry and cease to vex me," he answered with sudden tenderness. It was his last throw, "Say Yes, and that you will be my obedient and faithful wife, and this little cloud will have passed as if it had never been. Redeem the fortunes of your family, gratify my wish, and make yourself happy with what I offer!"

"I cannot!" said Perdita, turning away. And her voice, though full of distress, was decisive in its pronounced repugnance.

Mr. Brocklebank stood manfully battling with the humiliation and surprise of this denial. He thought his young friend very mad and very bad, and wondered where she had got it from; but the day of force is over, and when women will not they cannot be made—so there the matter must rest.

Suddenly he turned his eyes on the poor culprit standing there in mute misery but in resolute denial all the same. Her downcast face was sad and overshadowed, but showed no sign of yielding—her drooping figure was crushed and overweighted, but it still looked as if it could bear and not go down before the burden of his displeasure. Sensitive and strong, suffering and resolute—there she was, that complex and bewildering Perdita whom no one understood and whom so many afflicted!

"May I ask one favour of Miss Perdita?" then said the ironmaster stiffly.

She lifted her eyes.

"Surely!" she answered. "You know that I will do all I can to please you!" she added, with a burst of her old impulsive affectionateness.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Words! idle words!" he muttered. "I have no respect for words; what I like is deeds! But that is beside the question. I have now to make one last request. Keep to yourself what I have said to you. I do not wish the whole of the family to be made acquainted with my humiliation!"

"Mr. Brocklebank! As if I should tell!" cried

Perdita with energy. "Why, of course not! I shall not say a syllable to any one. Oh, I am so sorry! so sorry!" she added.

"I will take your word for it," he answered; and without wishing her good-bye or even shaking hands with her, he turned away abruptly and tramped heavily down the stairs.

Mrs. Winstanley came out of the dining-room to meet him as he passed the door.

"Miss Perdita is obdurate, madam," he said when he saw her. "I have spoken to her from my heart and done my best to bring her to a proper frame of mind, but I have been unsuccessful. She is as hard as the nether millstone, obdurate all through."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Winstanley, her handsome face turning suddenly white. "I had hoped that you would have had some effect on her if I had none."

"I shared that hope, madam, but I have experienced its futility. Miss Perdita goes her own way, and I don't know the human being who could prevail on her against her will. *I* have failed!"

"Which says everything," said Mrs. Winstanley.

And the ironmaster answered back: "Everything, madam! everything!"

"Perdita!" said her mother, coming into the room where the rebel was still standing dazed and discomfited, "what is this I hear from Mr. Brockle-

bank? You have treated him with insolence? been obstinate, undutiful, ungrateful? he who has been your best friend! Are you really insane? Your conduct would seem to show that you are!"

"I did not know, mother, that I had been all that to Mr. Brocklebank," said Perdita aghast at this roll-call.

"What has he been saying to you that has given him such a shocking impression of you? What has he asked that you have refused?" asked Mrs. Winstanley.

"I said I would not speak of his conversation," said Perdita softly. "I can only tell you one thing—he wanted me to give up my friends."

"Your friends? In Heaven's name, Perdita, what and whom do you mean?"

"The Crawfords," she answered.

"Those chemist people? Those whom I demand of you to give up?"

"Yes, mother."

"And what did you say?"

"I could not."

Mrs. Winstanley kept a dead silence for a moment. Then she turned round and faced her daughter, to whom hitherto she had been speaking over her shoulder and askew.

"Now, Perdita," she said, as sternly as if her words had been iron rods with which she belaboured this wicked soul; "let us understand each other. This is my final word:—you choose between your

family and these new friends—you cannot keep both; and if you hold with them, you give up us."

"Mother—" she began.

"Not another word! You have your choice and my decision. If for the sake of these shopkeepers you choose to throw off your own family—to disgrace your mother and sisters—to be false to all the traditions of your order and your education—to dishonour your father's name and memory—you must. You are of age, and no one can prevent it if you wish to ruin yourself. But you shall not drag us down into your own shameful disgrace; and if you are obstinate, you know the penalty. Now go to bed and think over what I have said. No, do not kiss me; wait until you are good before you pretend to be loving. Go; and when you say your prayers to-night ask for a new heart and a contrite spirit."

CHAPTER XII.

ET TU, BRUTE?

HAD he? Neither Mrs. Winstanley nor Thomasina liked to believe it possible that Perdita could have been so wicked—liked to acknowledge to themselves that the great chance had gone from them and the golden price had slipped through their fingers. But he had—he surely had!—for though

Benjamin Brocklebank was just the kind of man to spend a whole evening in sermonizing a delinquent on the sin of unpunctuality and the evil of undesirable associates, still, he looked more fierce and angry when he left than would have been justified by even a quarrel about that abominable woman in scarlet satin tartan; and Perdita had a curiously overwhelmed manner, as if she had heard something that was more than unexpected and worse than unpleasant.

Though devoured by curiosity and distracted by doubt Mrs. Winstanley did not dare to ask the question point-blank. A strictly proper English mother may practically put up her daughters to auction, to be knocked down to the highest bidders, but theoretically she keeps them under a glass case. And to ask her daughter if a gentleman has proposed to her simply because he has been left alone with her for a couple of hours was too much against the recognized code to be thought of for a moment. Hence, neither mother nor sister could get at the true state of the case; and the doubt which was moral certainty remained unconfirmed.

But, if she had refused him, then ought she to be banished from home without loss of time. She was not only of no good to the family commonwealth but she stood in the way of the others and intercepted golden chances which she despised and those others would have utilized. Even Eva

would have behaved with more common sense and right principle, more family feeling and filial piety, had this glorious chance fallen to her share; and as for Thomasina, it had been hers in the beginning and would have been hers to the end had not this tiresome rebel come in between. It was Perdita who had done all the mischief—Perdita who had turned the ironmaster from his appointed path and then shut against him that one of her own making which she had induced him to take—Perdita who had warped his better judgment and left him with the crook still unstraightened—Perdita who had warmed his frozen fanzy to the point of melting and determined his halting choice to that of decision, and who, after all the mischief that she had so wilfully done, had now said coolly: "No! I have snatched the golden ball from them and I will not keep it for myself! They shall not profit and I will not enjoy!"

What wonder then that Mrs. Winstanley and Thomasina, thinking all this of the rebel, resolved on her banishment as a measure of general protection as well as of her own individual punishment righteously accorded?

What a coil it all was! what a dreadful moment of disappointment and difficulty! What an indignity it was to have to submit to those insolent tradesmen with their threats of legal proceedings and getting by the law what they could not obtain by grace?—and what a heart-

break to think of the relief that had been possible and now was lost! Every one might have been paid off, and fresh scores begun which would have lasted for another five years' run. The name of Benjamin Brocklebank as her son-in-law would have been as good to Mrs. Winstanley as so much in the Consols. And here she was on the bare boards and her nose rasped at the grindstone, all because of that wicked girl, that shamefully disobedient rebel! Think too, what the position of the family would have been had this shocking person done her duty, or kept out of the way and let others do theirs! Thomasina would have been Mrs. Benjamin Brocklebank well endowed for life—or would have been left free for a fresh start;—Eva would have had a better foothold and a stronger spring-board for her matrimonial vault;—Perdita herself would have been either provided for and translated from the place of family disaster to that of family benefactress, or she would have been rendered harmless by the safety of her sisters. And she herself, the mother, the schemer, the debtor, the harassed tiller of fields which would not yield, the sad sower of grain that would not ripen, she would have been like a second Juno on her throne with the world at her proud feet. And now the whole thing had gone by the board; and instead of Olympus it was shipwreck!

Altogether it was really an awful moment; and poor Mrs. Winstanley might be excused if,

rendered desperate by her difficulties, she struck about her wildly—and struck cruelly though not quite unjustly. But she must not cry aloud nor call the world to witness her defeat. If she had to fall and there was no help for it, she must fall proudly, like great Cæsar, and hide her wounds beneath her velvet decorously and nobly. On the brink of destruction as she was, she determined to keep a brave front and not give her enemies cause to rejoice over her ruin before the moment when concealment would be impossible. And one visit which she would make with fife and drum and colours flying—that is, in a hired carriage and in her best attire; taking her two pretty daughters with her as witnesses of her worth—was to Lady Kearney, the blue riband of her visiting list. She wanted to see how things were in this quarter; and whether the duel had or had not awakened distrust in the mother and jealousy in the son. If it had, then she would encourage Bois-Duval, in secret and without the knowledge of Benjamin Brocklebank; if it had not and she found the lines where she had left them, then she would discourage him, and make him understand that he was *de trop*. This was a duty belonging to the hour and the circumstance.

They found Lady Kearney at home, and were ushered into the formal drawing-room, where nothing spoke of ease or cosy carelessness, and where all was eloquent of wealth, propriety, ex-

actness and the right thing. My lady's reception of her handsome visitors was, to say the least of it, frigid. She was polite, as a matter of course; but it was on the outside edge; and she took no pains to assume the grace of kindness beyond the obligations of ceremony. She had always been as much against this undesirable acquaintance of her son with the Winstanleys as was Mrs. Winstanley herself againt that of Perdita with Bell Blount and the Crawfords; and in the absence of that son, it was easy to make the women feel how low she, Lady Kearney, held them, and how inimical to them she was.

Well seasoned to social rebuffs as the major's widow was, the crushing coldness of her hostess was almost too much for her; and the difficulties of conversation were well nigh insurmountable. The only two topics on which Lady Kearney would open out, were that unlucky duel and Perdita's still more unlucky opinions. On the former she was almost eloquent in her scorn and disdain and showed clearly enough that she believed no word of that famous historical basis. She did not know which of the two girls to suspect, but she did suspect one and foul play all round; though Hubert, who had been in the fray, was as good as married to Maud Disney, and her own son, who was free, had been out of it. Yet for all this odd entanglement and appearance of general misfit, she felt sure that underneath this affair was something

which Mrs. Winstanley did not wish to have known and which would compromise her and hers were it known.

"It was a very odd affair from first to last," she said, looking at Mrs. Winstanley with her most unpleasant expression. "I never heard of such a thing in our peaceful days as a duel about a few feats in history! Can you say positively, Mrs. Winstanley, that no more personal motive influenced the young man?"

She turned her formidable pince-nez on the two girls when she said this. Thomasina, looking at a book of photographs, was simply passive and uninterested; Eva was playing with the Kearney skye, which was tearing the fringe on her dress. Like many selfish people, and like many cruel people, she was fond of pets.

"No other motive was known to me," answered Mrs. Winstanley blandly. "There might have been a gambling debt; of that I cannot be sure. It was during the races that this most disastrous quarrel broke out; but I can give no more than a mere guess, and I would not care to be cited as an authority."

"The young ladies know no more than their mother, I presume?" said Lady Kearney with a sneer.

Thomasina looked up from her book of photographs.

"I know only what mother knows," she said, with maidenly serenity.

"And I know nothing at all," said Eve, wiping the dog's eyes with its ears and lifting 'up her own blue limpid orbs with the sweetest expression of innocence to be found on a human face.

"Your very outspoken daughter, who proclaims herself a red republican and an atheist and who is not with you to-day, has no different view, I dare say?" said Lady Kearney with a satirical smile. "I should like to have had a little talk with her. She would probably have had an original theory of her own. It might not have been correct, but it would be sure to have been bold and amusing."

"My daughter Perdita? she was not with us at Trouville. She knows less than little Eva," said Mrs. Winstanley quite calmly and suavely. "I left her in town under the care of an old governess of hers; as, for certain reasons with which I need not trouble you, it was not desirable to take her so far from home."

"Ah!" said Lady Kearney; "she would be an inconvenient witness, I should say, where things had to be concealed."

"Very," answered Mrs. Winstanley with the most charming and delightful frankness. "She is the soul of truth and candour and could neither tell a falsehood nor keep a secret to save her life. She would be sure to make all the world free of

what she knew! But as in this matter she knows no more than we do, and indeed not so much, she has nothing to conceal, because she has nothing to tell."

Lady Kearney looked at her visitor from head to foot;—looked at her insolently, keenly, distrustfully. She was like a terrier sniffing round a closed box with a rat inside. She was conscious that the creature was there, but she could not get at it. She had no actual evidence that the Winstanley hand was in the duel, but her *flair* was unerring, and she trusted to it.

"It was a most extraordinary affair, look at it how one will," she said again. "And I confess I should like to get to the bottom of it."

"So should I; very much indeed," said Mrs. Winstanley; "if indeed there be anything to get at more than we know already. If there be it is as much a mystery to me as to any one. By the way, when does my good friend Sir James return?" she added suddenly.

"My son's movements are independent of me and I do not regulate them. I cannot tell when he will return," answered Lady Kearney with extreme stiffness.

She thought the question a liberty that warranted more than the reproof of coldness, and she would have liked to have marked her sense of disgust in other ways than by that of mere coldness.

"I am meditating a small party, just to amuse the girls; but I do not care to give it without Sir James," said Mrs. Winstanley genially, as if taking Lady Kearney into her confidence. "I hope every day to hear of dear Hubert's complete recovery, when his marriage with our dear Maud will come off immediately. And I want to give my little party as a kind of *avant-propos* of congratulation; but"—with even more of that quasi-sisterly friendliness with which she had begun her speech—"not without our dear Sir James! He is a host in himself; and so kind to my girls,—so nice in every way that I should be lost without him! And really young men in general are such unaccountable creatures—so difficult and odd, that it is delightful to get hold of one like your son, who is so amiable and friendly."

In general Mrs. Winstanley was reasonable—for a woman remarkably so; but in her present mood she dropped the silken cord of her ordinary good sense and took up instead a goad, with the prod well sharpened.

"My son is much flattered by your appreciation, Mrs. Winstanley," drawled Lady Kearney. "When he has to work for his daily bread, as your daughter Perdita was so anxious to do, I shall feel justified in asking you for a character as lackey. You describe the functions admirably!"

"I shall be most happy to take him into my service," said Mrs. Winstanley smiling.

Lady Kearney curled her thin lips.

"Precisely," she answered; "that is the whole thing."

"Then you do not know when he returns?" asked Mrs. Winstanley. "I must write to him. He is so amiable that I am sure he will even derange his plans that he may come to me for my little gathering. He knows what a favourite he is with us all. My girls look on him as a kind of brother. If a double maternity were possible, Lady Kearney, I should dispute him with you as my son."

The very bravado of her insolence silenced Lady Kearney. She could scarcely believe her own ears; and astonishment at this woman's impudence kept her tongue-tied.

Thomasina looked at her mother in surprise. Why had she cast policy to the winds in this odd manner? It was not like her to go out of her way to irritate one who could be so formidable an enemy as Lady Kearney and who might, if she would, be such a valuable friend. But Mrs. Winstanley was only human, like the rest of us; and for all her natural suavity and acquired self-control, she sometimes broke the cords and became natural, free and unwise, like more stupid and less conventional people.

"Unfortunately, my son chooses his own friends," said Lady Kearney, speaking slowly and with meaning. "He does not consult me, nor follow my counsels when I give them. It would

be better if he did; but there are certain people whom he would not know, if he did."

"I quite agree with you, dear Lady Kearney," said Mrs. Winstanley, her acting admirable. "You may count on me as an earnest coadjutor who will use all her influence to maintain your prestige of maternal advice. The young of the present day are really too independent; but I will help you with your son, rely on it."

"I do not suppose, Mrs. Winstanley, that you mean to insult me?" said Lady Kearney, rising in her wrath.

"I insult? My dear Lady Kearney! quite the contrary! I meant to help you," said the bland visitor sweetly.

"Yet you must know that you have said the most cutting thing that one woman could say to another! the most insulting!" cried the mother of Sir James with strong agitation.

"Regard it then as not having been said—accept my apologies for an unfortunate appearance of things!" cried Mrs. Winstanley. "I love your dear son and admire his mother too much to wish to offend. It has been a mistake—a mishap! *voilà tout!* You cannot refuse this apology?"

All this was said in the most caressing, the most velvety manner imaginable. Mrs. Winstanley was more than herself, she was Mrs. Winstanley *in excelsis*.

Lady Kearney stiffened as the other sweetened.

"I hate such misunderstandings!" she said sternly.

"And I also, dear Lady Kearney; but this was no misunderstanding! It was merely one friend speaking to another—a sister, I might almost say, to a sister!"

"Mrs. Winstanley, when did I permit you to take this tone of intimacy?" cried Lady Kearney.

"My love for your son and your own sweetness and grace have emboldened me! Blame your own virtues, dear Lady Kearney, if you are loved better than you care to be!" said Mrs. Winstanley with a delightful smile. "Come, my dears," to her daughters, "we must really tear ourselves away. Your house is too delightful, dear Lady Kearney; but we must go!"

"Never to be admitted again," said Lady Kearney even before they had gone. "If I quarrel seriously with that ungrateful boy—never again!"

"What an awful old toad that Lady Kearney is!" said Eva, when they had left the house. "What a humour she was in! Old horror! I should like to have beaten her! I longed to give her a good pinch, she was so cross and detestable! Poor sweet Mums! It was quite too awful of her!"

"She is not very suave," said Mrs. Winstanley

quietly; "but we have to meet with odd people in life; and after all, does not our own superiority come out in such encounters? If we can show ourselves to be all right in manner, and these others all wrong——"

"So much to our score!" laughed Eva.

But Thomasina thought to herself that her mother had not acted quite up to her principles in this last encounter; and that she had played Lady Kearney's game because she had not been true to her own.

"She was frightfully trying, certainly!" said Our Eldest, as a kind of mental apology for her beloved mother.

And Mrs. Winstanley smiled benignly and answered:

"Yes, frightfully; but I think she will not attempt to put me down again;" as if she had done a meritorious and not a socially reprehensible action, and had been wise in her generation instead of foolish.

The events of the day were not yet at an end, for soon after they reached home a resounding knock and peremptory ring, which would have been eloquent enough to Perdita, announced the demand of Bell Blount for a conference with Mrs. Winstanley. One of those stormy petrels of life who always accompany social convulsions, it was in the natural order of things that the Champion of her Sex should make her visit, which was to bring

increased confusion, on a day already full of annoyance. It would not have been in harmony with her being had she gone to No. 100 when the family was in smooth water, as sometimes if so rarely happened; she must needs make her appearance to-day, when Perdita was already in such dire disgrace, and add to the punishment of the sinner on whose head it was scarcely worth while to heap more trouble.

It is to be supposed, however, that Bell Blount was satisfied with herself and in her own mind believed that she was doing what was best for the girl's future life, if the worst for her present peace.

"I owe you an apology for this intrusion, Mrs. Winstanley," she began in the oddly caressing and yet unsympathetic voice which made her so strangely out of harmony with herself.

Mrs. Winstanley, standing as she had just risen from her easy-chair, received her unwelcome guest as glacially as Lady Kearney had just received her and her daughters. It was passing it on; and it pleased the major's widow to play off on another the uncomfortable airs which had just been played off on herself.

She did not disclaim the apology of the intrusion; she simply bent her head as stiffly as if her spine had but one joint, and that worked a little rustily, saying in a cold voice:

"To what am I indebted for the unexpected

honour of this visit?" the accent on 'honour' making it read 'impertinence,' just as a coloured light changes the hues of a landscape.

"I want to speak to you about your daughter Perdita," said Mrs. Blount, coming to the point. She was afraid that her patience would not hold out should she have to submit for any length of time to Mrs. Winstanley's fine airs; besides, she was too full of the subject of her visit to care for circumlocution.

"I do not know what you can have to say to me about my daughter Perdita," returned Mrs. Winstanley haughtily, still holding her head high and her neck stiff.

"If you will have the kindness to listen, you will find out," said Bell Blount coolly; "and if you will have the patience and propriety, madam, to hear me to the end, you will thank me for what I am going to say. Perdita is a good girl, a very fine, noble kind of creature in some directions; but she is on the wrong tack. She is too democratic, too unwilling to submit to the established rules of society; and she must be kept by force in the right way, else she will get terribly far on the wrong. I am, as you know, a Woman's Rights woman, heart and soul; and I have devoted myself to our emancipation from the tyranny of man and the restrictions of our sex; but that is not being a Red Republican, not a wild harebrained democrat and Nihilist as your daughter is. I would

keep to the usages and the classes of society, as I would keep to anything else that was wholesome and beautiful; and the more strenuous my efforts to get great principles established in the teeth of popular prejudice, the more earnest I would be to preserve certain forms and fashions untouched. Your daughter Perdita would let everything go to destruction; and if asked to loosen the bearing-rein would end by taking off the head-stall and pulling out the linchpin."

"Will you kindly tell me the meaning and point of all this?" asked Mrs. Winstanley coldly, as Bell stopped to take breath.

"Willingly—I am coming to it. The meaning and the point are one thing, and that is—Leslie Crawford. Your daughter Perdita is bewitched with these chemist people and I have come to you to tell you what I know, that you may stop the intercourse which should never have been begun. They are people belonging to my old home and I know all about them. This young man married his cousin—-of itself a crime—and his conduct to her was so infamous that he sent her mad. She has been in an asylum for the last two years; and there is she still and is likely to continue. When he had shut her up tight and fast, he left our village and came up to London; established himself in High Street; scraped acquaintance, the mischief knows how, with that inconsiderate girl of yours; and now she is for ever running in and

out their house like a tame cat and takes the opinion of that ignorant and underbred shopkeeper and his half-idiotic old aunt or mother, whatever she may be, rather than she will take mine—or yours. It is an infamy—an infamy!" repeated Bell Blount warmly; "and it must be put a stop to at once!"

By this time she had talked herself into a state of excitement. All her worst passions were roused through her jealousy, her anger, at this intrusion of the masculine element in a friendship where she desired to be sole and supreme. If, to punish her for her infidelity to the Cause and herself, Bell Blount could have done poor Perdita some mortal injury in body or spirit, she would have done so—she who so short a time ago had loaded the girl with caresses and desired nothing so much as the possession of her life, her conscience and her love! But the jealousy which such women as she feel against men as their rivals with other women is greater than jealousy of the more ordinary kind; and Bell would have forgiven her husband, had he loved another woman, sooner than she would have forgiven Connie Tracy had she found another 'chum,' or than she could suffer Perdita's natural inclination for Leslie Crawford. All her love for the girl had now turned to hate, and Mrs. Winstanley was not more resolute to enforce conformity with custom, more furious against these eccentric divergences, than was Bell Blount, now

that it had come to one of the oppressed taking a line of her own which did not run parallel with that of the man-hating Champion of her Sex.

"I have already spoken to my daughter about these people," said Mrs. Winstanley with less acidity than before. "I thank you for the hint."

"It is just this kind of thing which does the Cause so much harm," said Bell. "Because we fight for justice and equality—for protection and self-support—that does not include such vagaries as these! We are not Red Republicans or anarchists because we want the schools to be opened to women equally with men—because we want the professions to be in common—because we think that University endowments should be shared with us—that all careers should be as free to the one sex as to the other. We do not want our lady-girls to marry tradespeople because we advocate independence! It is a loss to the Cause that such things should be done or thought!"

"I confess I always classed you all together," said Mrs. Winstanley. "I have been much afflicted by the strange ideas and democratic tendencies of my second daughter; and I do not deny that, when I heard she had added the Emancipation of Women to her *répertoire*, I gave you credit for aiding and abetting her in all her unwisdom."

"See there!" cried Bell with energy. "See what harm such silly exaggeration does! I am

a conservative, Mrs. Winstanley, a strong conservative; and democracy is abhorrent to me. I honour the throne and respect the nobility; I love the Church and reverence the hierarchy; and my only difference with received opinion is that I hold women as sacred creatures and all men as their inferiors—only some more so than others."

"I cannot understand then your friendship with my daughter, she whose democracy is so pronounced, so dreadful!" said Mrs. Winstanley.

"No? It was her strength that attracted me," answered Bell. "But now that I see how mistaken she is, and how she clings to her old-world ideas and persuasions and fal-lal feminine instincts, and all the rest of it, I have done with her; and I put you, her mother, on your guard, simply that she may not be irredeemably ruined."

At that moment Perdita came home.

"Come here, Perdita," her mother said as the girl entered the room, amazed and dismayed when she saw Bell Blount sitting there as one at home. "You think me hard and harsh to you," she went on to say; "you dispute my commands because you imagine yourself more enlightened than I, your mother—more *au courant* of the greatest principles of life; and now I want to show you to yourself. Here is one of your prized leaders, Mrs. Blount, of whose friendship you have spoken to me with pride, who has come to denounce you

and your folly to me; and to engage me to take measures by which your further extravagances may be prevented."

"I do not understand it all," said Perdita, holding up her head and meeting Bell Blount's eyes straightly, clearly, fearlessly.

"It means, Miss Winstanley, that I have been telling your mother of your infatuation—for I can call it nothing else—for that chemist fellow and his mother—those Crawfords of High Street—a man who sent his wife mad by his evil conduct and who presumes to go about with a young lady like yourself as his equal. A married man casting sheep's eyes at a virtuous girl!—a tradesman speaking and acting as if he were your equal!"

Bell's handsome face became livid as she spoke. Her enmity to this presumptuous shopkeeper was surely strangely strong to warrant such a display of passion, of hatred, of revenge.

"He is my equal; and more—he is my superior," said Perdita's clear voice. "It was not his evil conduct that sent his wife mad, but her own. He acted nobly, grandly, like a hero. And he is not a married man—she is dead."

"Then, Mrs. Winstanley, look out!" cried Bell rising in extreme agitation. "That fool of yours is in love with him, and, by the Lord, she will run off with him!"

"Bell!" cried Perdita; "is this what you mean by friendship?"

"Friendship! I have no friendship with a girl who forsakes the Cause and forgets what is due to herself as a lady!" answered Bell. "If you had kept with me I would have protected you with my life; but renegade as you are, you must not count on my support."

"Now you see where your folly has led you, Perdita!" said her mother. "Every one abandons you, even your own friends."

"Every one but God and my own conscience," said Perdita with solemn passion. "And while these stand by me, I will let the rest go!"

"God and your conscience!" cried Bell Blount. "You mean your perverted instincts and your worse than silly fancy! If Leslie Crawford had been five foot nothing, and pitted with the small-pox, you would not have found God or your conscience either in sticking to him. Call things by their right names, Miss Winstanley!"

"But this is intolerable—it is insupportable!" said Mrs. Winstanley. "Mrs. Blount! I cannot submit to this! Do me the favour not even to imagine such a horror as possible. *My* daughter with any personal feeling for a tradesman! That she should like the woman as her friend was bad enough—this is unendurable!"

"It is the truth," said Bell. "She cannot deny it."

"I do not know what it is that I have to deny," said Perdita.

"That you love Leslie Crawford," said Bell.

The girl turned deathly pale, but she stood her ground.

"If you mean that I respect him and believe in him— I do," she said firmly. "And I love his mother."

"Trash!" said Bell coarsely. "It is the son, not the mother, I tell you! If you deceive others you cannot deceive me. Mark my words, madam," to Mrs. Winstanley; "before the year is out you will have a shopkeeper for your son-in-law."

"I would rather see her dead at my feet!" cried Mrs. Winstanley passionately.

"Mother!" cried Perdita, shocked and revolted; "this is blasphemy against humanity! The man ranks before the station—Christ came as a carpenter!"

"Leave the room, Perdita! be thankful that I do not say leave the house—-that I do not disown you!" cried Mrs. Winstanley, pointing to the door.

"You have already disowned me, mother, in heart and substance," returned Perdita; "you might as well finish with it. It wants only the form. But I did not think that this would have come to me through you," she added, turning to Bell Blount.

"Blame yourself, not me," answered Bell; "and blame that vile man most of all."

"Go, Perdita—not another word!" said Mrs. Winstanley. "I thank this friend of yours, this

Mrs. Blount, for her proper feeling—her womanly information."

"Mother!" cried Perdita.

"Go!" repeated her mother; and Perdita walked somewhat proudly out of the room, feeling that surely now her cup was full. But such a cup as hers holds a fearful amount before it runs over!

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHIN THE SHEEPFOLD.

HUBERT STRANGWAYS lost to her and secured by his own—Sir James a laggard, threatening to become a deserter—Benjamin Brocklebank probably rejected and certainly affronted—Thomasina not sought by any, though a jewel fit for a prince to wear—Perdita consorting with tradespeople as their friend and fit companion—her debts heavy and her creditors troublesome, where could poor Mrs. Winstanley look for help?

When the doorbell rang and the servant ushered in M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval, it was to the harassed widow as if the empty lucky bag had had another shake and she had been allowed the chance of another prize—a meagre one if you will, but as the last of the series better than none at all.

A titled son-in-law, though only a 'fusionless' foreigner, would stop the gaping mouths of her

creditors with the whipped cream of expectation and a big word; and as Madame la Vicomtesse de Bois-Duval, little Eva would be socially well placed enough. Not so well certainly as if she had been either Lady Kearney or Mrs. Strangways; still, not badly for one whose face was all her fortune—not so badly as to lessen Thomasina's chances or to cause contempt for her own choice. Mrs. Winstanley, rapidly reviewing all the points of her position, received the young Frenchman gracefully; and no one would have thought by her manner that she was greeting the all-but murderer of the man whom she had so cleverly played and so ardently desired to land as her son-in-law. Poor soul! there was more gratitude in her grace than she would have cared for him to know—more desperation in her hospitality to a potential son-in-law than she would have confessed even under torture!

This visit was in more senses than one a reconnaissance made by the Vicomte. He had an idea that things were rather shaky in this solid-looking, respectable English home, and that these pretty creatures standing in the marriage market-place were waiting rather too eagerly for their purchasers. He saw that it would not be difficult for any man with twopence halfpenny of which he could make threepence to become Mrs. Winstanley's son-in-law and the husband of one of Mrs. Winstanley's daughters; and by this he made out

that their own portions would be slender. He did not think that they had none at all and were to be given away gratis; still less that the man existed who would take them on these terms—bearing them on his shoulders as a lifelong burden unpaid for. So far as he himself was concerned, he had no desire to take them on his, *dot* or no *dot*. He had no intention of marrying and ranging himself just yet. The free field of bachelorhood was more to his mind. Notwithstanding the large crop already raised, he had sackfuls of wild oats yet to sow; and Eva was a pretty little thing, just cut out for the part which he had decided that she should play.

It was her mother's fault and her own folly, he said to himself, twisting his moustaches. The one ought to be more careful of such brittle wares as youth and beauty, and the other ought to be more prudent. When shepherds wish to keep their lambs safe they shut them up in the sheepfold and let the watch-dogs loose. But if one imprudent little ewe lamb *will* creep through the fence and deceive the dog, is the wolf to forswear his nature and forego the dainty morsel that comes of its own free will between his paws? Not if that wolf were M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval, and the dainty morsel an English girl without father or brother to avenge her, and only a mother casting about for husbands to watch over her!

Besides this reconnaissance for Eva's sake

and his own future, Bois-Duval wanted to understand how it came about that familiar relations existed between a Winstanley and Leslie Crawford. Wherefore he called at No. 100 boldly—for all that project in his pocket which dealt with the invasion of the sheepfold and the ewe lamb struggling through the fence; a project which, it might have been thought, would have made the mother of little Eva just the one person in all the world whom he would have least cared to see.

He found Mrs. Winstanley alone. Thomasina and Eva had gone to a friendly five-o'clock-tea with no other companionship than their own. To do her justice they did not often 'beat the fields' on their own account and unaccompanied by her; but to-day she was too much preoccupied to feel up to the task of smiles and small-talk. The duns who crowded round her, the sons-in-law whom she could not catch, and the great prize of all which she felt sure had been rejected, together with Perdita's shameful sin of practical democracy, according to the accusations of Bell Blount, had overwhelmed her. She must have an hour or so of absolute quiet, else her health and her nerves would break down—and then where would they all be?

But it was unlucky that Bois-Duval should have called to-day of all the days in the week, and thus should have caught her out in maternal

negligence which to him would seem more reprehensible than it was. It could not be helped now; and an improvised chaperon would be a white lie good at a pinch and hurting no one.

After the usual introductory phrases had been exchanged, Bois-Duval asked after the young ladies with scrupulous formality as to terms but suggestive warmth as to manner. That manner was so warm and yet so delicate, it would not have surprised the mother had he opened negotiations on the spot. It made her heart flutter as if she had been a girl herself waiting on the humour of her lover and yearning for the moment when he should have done with indecision and come finally to the point of declaration.

"They are quite well, thank God!" she said with that kind of maternal love tinged with piety which is so effective and edifying; "always well and always good!"

"I trust I may have the pleasure of seeing them," said M. le Vicomte with graceful desire, looking round the room as if he expected to find them hidden behind the chairs or between the folds of the curtains.

"Oh yes! they will soon return," she answered. "They have only gone to a friend's, close at hand."

"Without you?" he asked brusquely.

"Actually!" she answered with smiling sweetness. "I put them in charge of a trustworthy

chaperon; and doubtless they are wearying themselves as young girls do in formal réunions where all the gentlemen are on one side of the room and all the ladies on the other, like antagonistic forces!"

"I do not know this style of réunion in England," he said drily. "All that I know belong to a freer style, where the gentlemen and the ladies mingle together without constraint, and the chaperon is for the most part conspicuous by her absence from her charge."

"Yes? That is, I know, one of the forms of English society; but not in the class to which we belong," said Mrs. Winstanley with the unostentatious pride of secure caste. "My lady friends and myself—we seldom, if ever, lose sight of our daughters or delegate our duty to any one else. Sometimes, of course, it is unavoidable, as to-day; but we hold to the duty of strict surveillance and the value of maternal companionship."

"Yet your English young ladies have a great deal more liberty than we Frenchmen can understand," said Bois-Duval, as he had said twenty times before.

"Some have greatly too much," she answered. "I have never gone into the new system myself, and I deplore it in others. I keep my daughters as close as a French mother would keep hers and reap my reward in their perfect innocence and

sincerity. They know nothing of evil and they could not deceive me."

"Ciel! such a thing would be impossible!" said Bois-Duval with perfect gravity: it was almost too perfect. "And yet"—shaking his forefinger slowly before his face—"not quite like French girls, believe me, madame!"

"No?" She lifted up her eyes and raised her eyebrows in surprise. "In what do they differ?"

"The two whom I have the honour to know are probably in accord with my ideas," said Bois-Duval; "but that one of madame's daughters whom I have not the honour to know and who walks arm-in-arm with a stupid grocer or chemist or some such canaille—that, madame, is an anomaly impossible with us! Such a thing could not exist in France. It would be as monstrous as if a well-born young lady were to go about the streets in a blouse and casquette."

Mrs. Winstanley turned pale; but she kept her voice steady if her blood proved a traitor to her self-command.

"A daughter of mine on the arm of a chemist?" she repeated with a forced smile. "Are you sure of your eyesight, Vicomte? You must have made a mistake. These false likenesses are so bewildering and misleading!"

"It was the young lady whom I saw in your box at the theatre the other night, and who is,

I presume, the sister of those two charming demoiselles who are confessedly your daughters?" said Bois-Duval airily. "If she is their sister then it was your daughter, madame, whom I met the other evening at dusk walking under the escort of Leslie Crawford, a chemist. I mention the fact merely as an illustration of the difference existing between the English code of manners and our own. It has no other significance for me!"

"That young lady is my daughter," said Mrs. Winstanley; "but let me assure you, M. le Vicomte, this is *not* an ordinary occurrence in our society; and it is too extraordinary to be believed."

"Truly?" He spoke as if asking for information. "I am glad to hear this for the sake of the nation, but sorry that I spoke. Perhaps I ought to say sorry that I saw, for the sake of the young lady herself."

"No, it is best, if it be really true and is not an error," said Mrs. Winstanley, her parched lips moving with difficulty.

"At the worst it was only an act of caste imprudence, a piece of too openly defiant democracy for good taste and good sense," said the Vicomte soothingly. "There can be no personal danger in it, for my brave grocer is already married; or was, when I knew of his miserable little existence some two or three years ago."

"It is odd that you yourself, Vicomte,

should have known anything about such a man!" cried Mrs. Winstanley, turning against her visitor with as much ferocity as it was in her nature to feel.

"I?" he laughed. "I know my brave grocer like my glove! I was slightly acquainted with his little wife. She was at the same school in Paris as a certain young protégée of my aunt's, and I used to see her at my aunt's house en petit comité on the jours des vacances. She was a pretty little person—but polissonne—ma foi! she was all that and more! When I was last in England chance threw her in my way; and I thus became acquainted with my chemist, her respectable husband, with whom, I confess, she was not always enraptured. That is the little history, madame. You see it is neither odd nor mysterious."

"Mysterious, no; but always a little odd that a man of M. le Vicomte's position should have cared to become personally acquainted with people so far benath him in the social scale!"

It was quite a relief to Mrs. Winstanley to be able to say this. It shifted the burden by half an inch or so, and slackened the strain of her own discomfort by passing it on to him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A man may condescend and not be hurt, where, to a woman, a lower scale of association is destruction," he said carelessly. "What harm can it possibly do me to know a pretty little

bourgeoise more or less familiarly? But when it comes to an unmarried girl knitting up strict relations with a shopkeeper—that, madame, I think you will allow to be another matter altogether! But, faith! I am sorry I spoke! I used the fact merely as an illustration of manners, not in any sense as an accusation. Now let us speak of something else. Our grocer is getting as tedious to us as he was to the little Florence."

He turned the conversation abruptly into another channel, and talked of Trouville and the company which had assembled there; of the races and the bathing; the things which had happened last season and which he trusted would happen next; but—was it fancy? Mrs. Winstanley thought she saw a certain subtle something in his manner, a film of mockery that just suggested disrespect—as if the discovery that one of the daughters of the house was on familiar terms with a tradesman lowered the status of the whole family, and put them that one step below himself which rendered the last polish of courtesy unnecessary.

That unlucky Perdita! By what terrible decree of fate was it that she had been told off to be their scourge! Her comparative plainness, her awkward shyness, her reprehensible opinions, her almost criminal conduct, her unfeminine democracy, her unladylike love of liberty—everywhere she stood between them and the sunlight and brought shadows and annoyances upon them! Had Mrs.

Winstanley been superstitious she would have believed in some great family crime, committed in the ages long ago, of which this ill-starred rebel was the family retribution. As things were, she was an anomaly in good sooth!—a cuckoo in the hedge-sparrow's nest, a crab-apple among the golden pippins, a field-daisy on the same stalk with a triad of highly-cultivated garden asters. How she came among them at all was a mystery to the distracted mother—a mystery and a scourge in one!

Presently the girls came home. All three were together, Perdita having overtaken her sisters at the end of the street; and naturally all three came into the room together. For though the rebel was under sentence of capital punishment, reprieved only for a few days to give her the chance of repentance, she was not completely shut off from the family and her presence among them, if not desired, was not resented.

Bois-Duval rose and greeted the two whom he knew—Thomasina with respectful admiration, Eva with flattering warmth. Then he bowed with formal politeness to Perdita and looked round at Mrs. Winstanley.

It was odd to see the difference in the manners of the girls. Thomasina was suavely cold and smoothly haughty; little Eva was fluttered, frightened, excited, shy; while Perdita, recognizing the man against whom Leslie Crawford had warned her, flushed from brow to chin, and turned away with

the rude brusquerie of a sincere girl who thinks it incumbent on her to make a scamp understand that she knows he is a scamp and therefore holds him to be out of the pale of charitable association altogether.

Her mother, who was watching her, saw both her flush and her abrupt movement. She read these as the signs of embarrassment in being thus brought face to face with the witness of her misdemeanour. Bois-Duval, knowing what Leslie could say if he would, perhaps had a different interpretation for his own private use. What he might think howeve , was nothing to the purpose. Thoughts are not words;—may we not be thankful for the power of putting on the armour of hypocrisy as a protection against discovery? And as part of that protection, Bois-Duval emphasized this little scene by turning to Mrs. Winstanley with a half comical, half appealing look, slightly raising his eyebrows, as if he had said:

"These the manners of a Winstanley? This the breeding of a sister to the potential Vicomtesse de Bois-Duval?"

"Perdita, Monsieur le Vicomte de Bois-Duval," said Mrs. Winstanley, somewhat unwisely. It is always well to let sleeping dogs lie; and Perdita's uncomfortable sincerity was a dog which had all his teeth.

Perdita, thus admonished, made the slightest inclination of her head possible to be construed

into a bow. She was just not savage enough to the point of refusing this act of recognition; her truth would bear no greater strain than this; but she was angry with herself for not having the courage to refuse even this.

"I had the honour of meeting mademoiselle the other night," said Bois-Duval breaking the first lance.

"Yes," said Perdita hardily; "I saw you."

"I was saying to madame how much I admire your English democratic feeling," said Bois-Duval with a pleasant philosophizing kind of air. "This *is* the young lady, madame, of whom I have just spoken to you," he continued, turning to Mrs. Winstanley— "the young lady whom I met in the dark leaning on the arm of the grocer Crawford —one of the class which we, in our benighted aristocratic pride, would call the canaille."

The word made Perdita wince. It was false as applied to Leslie; all the same it made her wince. Mrs. Winstanley did not speak. She could not; her tongue was too dry, her lips too parched for words. Thomasina drew herself up like a young queen, indignant with both delinquents alike; and from Eva's pretty blue eyes came a flash of anger which, had it had veritable 'dynamic' force, would have crushed the unlucky rebel on the spot.

"The courage with which young ladies like mademoiselle act out their principles of democratic equality, here in your brave England, is beyond all

praise," continued Bois-Duval, still sweetly philosophic. "We are now a republic"—in politics M le Vicomte was an Imperialist, and only regretted that he was in the age of his milk-teeth during the glorious era of Compiègne— "you can understand then how, as a Frenchman of the present day, I admire this courageous testimony!"

"There is no courage in taking the arm of a good and honourable man like Mr. Crawford," said Perdita, making a tremendous effort over herself to conquer her shyness for the sake of her truth.

"A grocer quand même? Admirable!" cried Bois-Duval.

"If Mr. Crawford were bad or dishonourable, then it would require courage to be seen with him, even if he were a prince!" said Perdita, warming to her work. "As it is I am proud of his acquaintance!"

"My dear Perdita!" said her mother, forcing a smile that was a spasm, a laugh that was a groan. "Your extraordinary ecstatics again!"

"Do you feel this exaltation for his wife as well?" asked Bois-Duval quite simply, as if sincerely anxious to know. "And how is that pretty little polissonne? She had good eyes, if I remember right; but for all the rest—body and mind, heart and brain—pouf!"

He flicked his fingers. This was the measure of her value to the man for whom she had sacri-

ficed her life and all that made that life honourable or worth having.

"I did not know the wife; but from what I do know *you* ought not to speak of her like this!" said Perdita hotly.

This time Bois-Duval's surprised look was genuine. He had expected that Leslie Crawford would have denounced him, but not that he would have given the reason why. Had he then made this young unmarried girl his confidante and told her the infamous truth? If so, the information which had been meant for bale would prove in reality for blessing, and Mrs. Winstanley ought to have been warned. And he need have no scruples about Eva. It was in the family; and at all events he was better than Leslie Crawford.

"I am at a loss to understand what mademoiselle means," said the Frenchman slowly. "I knew Miss Crawford when a little schoolgirl in Paris, and before she had married her Puritan cousin; and afterwards I did her the honour of calling on her. A gentleman may patronize a bourgeoise without loss of caste or dignity, where, if a lady condescends to a grocer, she is simply destroyed for life. But I do not know why mademoiselle should speak of my good word as specially deserved by la belle pharmacienne! I have no reason to idealize this little polissonne!"

"You are talking in riddles, Perdita. What can you possibly know of this young person, or

of M. le Vicomte's acquaintance with her!" said Mrs. Winstanley, again forcing a laugh that was in substance a groan.

"You funny old Per! You always know such a lot about everything!" said Eva in an undertone.

Thomasina said nothing. She had her own ideas; and though she thought Perdita horribly unhandy, detestably gauche in all her works and ways, still she did not feel disposed to question her accuracy in this matter or to champion Bois-Duval.

"I know quite as much as I care to know," said Perdita, with the feeling of protecting her virtuous own from contaminating contact with a scoundrel. It was a trial having to do this thing; but is not all life a trial?—and are we not sent into the world to testify and suffer? "Mr. Crawford told me, mother, that M. Bois-Duval was a man whom you ought not to know and that I was to warn you against him. So I do."

Bois-Duval's olive-coloured face became livid; but he laughed with a nonchalant air, slightly tapping his forehead as he said compassionately:

"Poor young lady!—toquée!"

"Perdita, I command you to apologize to M. le Vicomte," said Mrs. Winstanley slowly. "Are you mad to insult a guest in my house in this unheard-of way, for no better reason than what a vulgar insolent shopkeeper may have said

to you? Forgive her, Vicomte!—she is incorrigible, we can do nothing with her! she is hopeless!"

"So I thought," he said; "but madness is a dangerous inheritance," he added thoughtfully, as if brought face to face with an unexpected danger.

Between madness and insolence, Mrs. Winstanley was almost sorry that she had put the alternative! The one seemed as bad as the other—each indeed was the worse the nearer it was looked at.

"You never believe me, mother!" said Perdita passionately. "If I were told anything by an angel from heaven you would not believe it simply because I said it to you!"

"Is this grocer your angel from heaven, mademoiselle?" asked Bois-Duval quietly.

That was a charming blot to hit!

"Apologize to M. le Vicomte, Perdita," repeated her mother.

"No, mother, I cannot," answered the rebel. "He is a bad man, and I will not pretend that he is a good one."

"Let me beg of you, madame, to let the matter drop!" pleaded Bois-Duval, with exceeding grace and courtly magnanimity. "Do not let the calumnies of a wretched scoundrel like this Crawford be the occasion of a moment's uneasiness! Suffer the young lady to calm herself. I am sure of my ground with you," smiling sweetly; "and her heated brain will only become yet more ex-

cited if the question is pressed. Let it drop, I beseech you!"

"At M. le Vicomte's request I will pass over your extraordinary conduct, Perdita," said Mrs. Winstanley after a pause. She was really uncertain how to bear herself in this, one of the worst of the many difficulties in which her daughter had so often placed her. "I think you have lost your senses," she continued; "but these things are not pleasant to discuss before strangers. Leave the room now and come and speak to me afterwards; but leave us now."

"Is she safe to be left alone?" asked Bois-Duval in an audible whisper.

"I am not mad," said Perdita quite gravely. He smiled.

"Of course not! of course not!" he answered with forced eagerness. It was the right tone to take in speaking to a lunatic whom he must soothe by compliance, not excite by contradiction. "Mad! whoever thought you were?" he added.

"If you are not you ought to be," was Eva's logical rejoinder.

"I have done my duty," said Perdita, flaming on the instant. "This is a bad man, and he has no business in your house, mother."

When she had shot this last bolt she turned and left the room; feeling as if she had been walking among red-hot ploughshares and had not wholly escaped burning.

Soon after this Bois-Duval too left; and even Thomasina did not catch the moment when that little note passed from his hand to Eva's, as he stroked "poor pussie," curled up in a round white ball in her arms, and said: "Jolie petite chatte! belle Minette!" with an emphasis and and a look which she alone understood.

When he had gone and Eva had scampered upstairs to her own room to read that fatal note, Mrs. Winstanley turned for comfort and counsel to her eldest daughter, whose silence and quiescence during all this disagreeable scene had struck her as somewhat extraordinary.

"What are we to do with her, Thomasina!" cried the poor mother in tears. "She grows intolerable!—worse and worse every day! I cannot bear it much longer!—and I feel that in duty to you and Eva I ought not."

"She is very uncouth, very tiresome, and does everything in the wrong way. One could shake her even when she does right," said Thomasina, throwing her rebellious sister's manner to the wolves; "but I think there is something in what she said; and she thought she was doing her duty, poor little thing," added, guarding the matter.

"Something in what she said?—do you think him bad, my dear?" asked the mother anxiously.

"More bad than good," Thomasina answered. "I watched his face and it was dreadfully con-

scious, though he tried to laugh it all off like a bad joke. I do not like him, dear mother," she continued earnestly; "I never have—and I have never trusted him. He is a frightful flirt, and means nothing all the while. He pays little Eva too much attention, for I am sure he does not intend to make her an offer."

"My dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Winstanley, "I have never seen anything to object to in his manner to the child! Surely you are exaggerating, and frightening yourself needlessly."

Thomasina looked at her mother, and an expression of the tenderest pity came over her face. That poor harassed mother! she would not add to her troubles! What there was to be done in this matter she would take on herself to do. She would keep it all as quiet as she had done hitherto, and make herself her sister's guardian—to save poor mother who had enough to worry her already!

"Well, perhaps I am too anxious about Eva," she answered. "She is such a pretty little thing, and so innocent, that one cannot be too careful of her. By-the-by," she added as if carelessly, "Sir James has returned; I saw him in Mrs. Merton's carriage. I suppose we shall see him here soon."

"Returned? I am glad of that," said Mrs. Winstanley as carelessly. "But what are we to do with Perdita, Thomasina? This horrible intimacy

with this man—this tradesman—this dreadful chemist creature, must be put a stop to, or really and truly she must leave the house. It is not fair to you girls to keep her, and this thing going on. What can she be thinking of? This disgraceful affair! I feel my very head turn when I think of it!"

"She must be put a stop to—or she must go; for a time at least," said Thomasina quietly. "It would spoil everything to have it known."

"Sir James for one would not care to continue his acquaintance with us; and I am sure that Mr. Brocklebank would not," said Mrs. Winstanley looking at Thomasina.

"They must not know," the wise elder daughter answered. "She must not stay at home," she repeated; "unless she will promise to give up this dreadful association. And that I do not think she will do."

"Why does she cling to it so tenaciously?" said Mrs. Winstanley. "I cannot believe that she is so lost, so abandoned, as to really care for the man. I believe it is nothing but at bit of her crazy democracy and wicked opposition. If it is more than this, Thomasina, it would break my heart for shame to think that a daughter of mine should so disgrace herself!"

"Oh, I can scarcely think this, dear mother!" answered Thomasina soothingly.

"If it is so, there will be no use in arguing

with her. She will go her own way whatever may be said," Mrs. Winstanley returned. "But if it is so, she must be disowned. I could not own her, Thomasina. I could not have the children of a chemist and druggist calling me grandmother! It would curdle my blood—I could not bear it! And so important as it is that you should all marry well—with these dreadful debts preying on me!"

"We will, dear mother; at least Eva and I will," said Thomasina, going over to her mother and kissing her. "Never fear—do not lose heart —all shall come right!"

And at the moment she felt strong enough to affront fate and fortune, and conquer both, in the service of that beloved mother whose self-command and high diplomacy—which a base world would have called manœuvring and deceit—had always roused her admiration and seemed to her the ultimate of womanly perfection.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCAPEGOAT.

PERDITA was a light sleeper. She was too intensely alive to sleep in the heavy way common to young people, and was easily awakened. Consequently, a slight noise on the night of Bois-Duval's visit roused her to full activity, where no one else

would have been troubled even by a dream; and she was up and about in less time than it takes to tell.

The noise that aroused her was as of some one stealing softly about the stairs and passages. The flooring of No. 100 West Hill Gardens was of that loquacious kind which betrays the steps even of unshod feet, the ill-laid boards creaking if only so much as a mouse ran over them; and this was undoubtedly something heavier than a mouse, though there was no sound of footfall or click of shoe-sole. Perdita made sure of burglars—men in masks with crowbars, jemmies, skeleton keys and pitch plasters, and as ready to take human life as to lift gear. But brave as some nervous women are, imagining everything and afraid of nothing, burglars or not of course it was her imperative duty to protect the sleeping household and give the alarm to the police before the robbers should have time to frighten mother or the girls. She was always ready for duties which demanded courage and exertion—duties which are best carried out by unselfishness and energy and where clumsiness and want of *savoir faire* do not count. She lighted her candle, opened her door, and with beating heart and straining eyes followed the footsteps down the stairs; forgetting that she offered herself as a target to any Bill Sykes who might be roaming about with a revolver in one hand and a life-preserver in the other. Indeed, she seldom thought

of her own risk at any time—never when her blood was up and she had something to do or more to say.

Always following the creak of the tread she went downstairs and came into the hall; and there she found Eva in the dark, in her hat and waterproof, a small carpet-bag on the floor beside her, with the chain in her hand on the point of opening the street-door.

On the other side stood some one gently tapping with the tips of the nails against the panel.

Eva gave a smoothered cry as Perdita suddenly seized her arm.

"Eva! what are you about?" said the rebel with natural indignation and surprise. "What on earth are you doing here at this time of night, dressed for going out, and opening the door? Are you mad?"

"It is no business of yours," said Eva defiantly.

"It is my business; it is every one's business!" answered Perdita warmly. "Who ever heard of such an extraordinary thing! Why! what are you doing? Where are you going?" she repeated.

"It is nothing. I was only going into the Square garden for fun," said Eva sullenly.

"The Square garden at twelve o'clock at night? That is not true, Eva," was her sister's reply. "There is something more in it than this.

Hark! what is that at the door? Stand back and let me see what there is."

"You shall not. You horrid interfering meddlesome thing, what right have you to speak to me like this, or interfere with me in any way?" cried the girl, but always in a whisper; "and you shall not open the door!" she repeated.

Made desperate by fear and strong by anger, she set her soft little back against the door and stood there fronting her sister and defying fate.

"I will know," said Perdita, excited to the last point and fearing she did not know what.

With one vigorous wrench, she displaced her sister, turned the key, flung open the door and stood face to face with Bois-Duval, standing there like a conspirator, in a slouched hat, with a Spanish cloak flung over one shoulder and hiding the lower part of his face.

"Wretch! how dare you!" was all that she could say, apalled and terrified as she was at this mystery of iniquity meeting her there on the threshold of their own home.

"I did not know that she would hear!" cried Eva, wringing her hands and unconsciously betraying herself and her lover.

"Peste!" said Bois-Duval brutally; "these maniacs are inconvenient! Do not cry, chère petite," to Eva; "I shall see you again, and without inconvenient intruders. Better chances next time. Do not be afraid. No harm will

come to you. Au revoir; dormez bien—and keep the maniac in good order!"

And with this he made an ironical bow to Perdita, kissed Eva's hand and darted down the street just as the policeman, slow, majestic, innocent, thinking no evil and only yawning at the slow progress of time, came round the other corner.

Perdita shut the street door with a slam that made the public protector start and put an end to all idea of silent secrecy at home; and then Eva turned against her in fury—Euphrosyne doubled with Alecto. But in her rage she did not forget prudence, nor the fact that although stone walls have no ears, sleeping mothers and vigilant elder sisters have; and that pelting an obnoxious busybody with invectives had better be done below the breath, with sobs well kept under, rather than in the clear excited tones in which that busybody herself spoke—she having nothing to conceal and being constitutionally indifferent to prudence.

In these few moments of anger, shame and disappointment, Perdita heard more than she had ever heard before about herself and her qualities —what they thought of her among themselves— in what especial abhorrence Eva herself held her —how ugly and horrid she was in person, how stupid and unlovable in mind—how they all hated to be with her and how much ashamed of

her they were;—heard more than she had ever dreamed of; and yet she thought she had known her standing pretty well by now.

She bore it all with praiseworthy philosophy for a while. She understood that Eva must be dreadfully angry to have been caught as she had been; and that of course she would say bitter things in revenge—things which must be borne with patience. Those who have put others in the wrong can afford to be magnanimous—the victor can smile at the futile despair of the vanquished. But even the patience of the victor has its limits; and little Eva was not one to trouble herself about the exact line which it would be unwise to pass beyond. When it came to: "And we all hate you, Perdita—Thomasina and mother and I—we all hate you; and we wish you were dead!"—then Perdita's strength gave way, and she broke out into that strange mixture of grief and rage which was at once her sin and its chastisement.

"You cannot wish me away more than I want to go. If you wish I was dead I wish so too. I would rather be dead than live here with you all!" she cried, clasping her hands and holding them up to her face.

Eva was frightened by the wild loud tone, the scared beart-broken look. The shaft had struck deeper than the foolish little archer had intended that it should. Nevertheless it was true; they did dislike that inharmonious and obstructive

rebel—and if they did not wish her absolutely dead, they did wish her away from home and off their hands for life. She need not have said so, but having said so she would not retract; for even Eva had her shadowy sense of truth which she was bound in conscience to obey.

"Hush, Perdita! don't make such a noise! Do hold your tongue and don't cry like this! You will wake mother and Thomasina, and then there will be a far worse row than even this is! And don't be such a goose as to take everything literally that one says in a passion," said Eva in a softened voice. "We don't wish you were dead —you great baby, crying like this over a hasty little word! For goodness sake, Perdita, don't go on like this!" she added, pulling at her sister's dress. "Ina and mother will hear you if you do; and then what will become of us?"

"I don't care! I don't care what becomes of me!" sobbed Perdita.

Her heart was really broken this time, and she was indifferent to all but the anguish of that terrible fracture.

"But I do," said Eva; "and I am sure if any one has cause to be unhappy I have," she added whimpering. "I have been very silly, and you think me a great deal worse than silly; and everything has gone wrong all round; but I don't want to make bad worse, so I shall go to bed."

With which she clutched her little bag, took

off her hat and crept up the stairs like a soft little white cat turned back from mousing; Perdita following, her candle in her hand, her brain on fire and her poor, big, soft heart crushed, as she thought, for ever.

She had no sooner shut herself into her own room than Thomasina opened the door and came to where she was sitting, thrown forward on the bed, her face buried in the pillows and her whole body one great palpitating throb of misery.

"Perdita, what is all this about?" said Thomasina, not quite so coldly as usual.

She did not know what had caused the quarrel between the sisters at this time of night downstairs, but she knew that Perdita would tell her the truth.

"I am glad you have come, Thomasina," said Perdita, speaking as well as she was able. "You ought to know all; and you are just and will not take sides."

Poor Perdita! how she, and such as she, cling to straws of loving faith against their sadder knowledge!

"Tell me what it all means," repeated Thomasina.

And Perdita gave her the little history: how that she had been awakened by a noise; had thought it was burglars and had gone downstairs to see; had found Eva in hat and cloak dressed for a walk, with a small carpet-bag on the floor,

on the point of opening the door to some one tapping on the outside; had herself opened it and come face to face with that abominable Frenchman standing there muffled up like a man on the stage; how then Eva was furious with her, and after saying a great many horrid things against her, had finally wound up by telling her that they all hated and detested her and wished that she was dead. And then poor Perdita wept again; horror at her sister's sin lost in the egotism of her own suffering.

Thomasina turned paler than even Perdita herself when she had confronted Bois-Duval. Had it then come to this? Was the family indeed doomed? Not only Perdita to destroy for the others those good chances which she would not utilize for herself—to lower the whole tone of their social position by her personal oddities and associates—but Eva also;—Eva, one of the best investments, the most solid-looking hope—Eva also turned traitor, ruining her family, breaking her mother's heart and flinging herself into destruction.

As she sat thinking out the position and its remedy, Perdita's tears touched her no more than the pattering of the rain against the skylight. The peril in which they all stood, and the mother's anguish were she ever to know the truth, were the deadly serpents which swallowed up the little cankerworms.

"Promise me, Perdita," she said after a pause;

"whatever happens do not tell mother about Eva. Bear or conceal anything, but do not tell her."

"If she asks me, how can I tell a falsehood?" said Perdita, much as if she had been asked to commit a murder or to build the pyramids.

"Tell a thousand rather than the truth!" her sister answered. "Promise me this, Perdita!"

"I cannot promise to tell a lie. I cannot tell lies," the rebel answered with solemnity.

Was there ever such an inconvenient conscience?—such a troublesome code of morality?

"Selfish and egotistical as usual!" said Thomasina with disdain. "I would not have your morality, Perdita, for the whole world! You would not stir a finger to save mother from an annoyance that might perhaps kill her, if you had any silly superstitious idea that it was wrong to stir it! You care only for yourself and for what you choose to think right; and you do not care for what you make others suffer. I am sick of such selfishness! I know I would tell a thousand falsehoods to save either Eva's character or mother's pain."

"What does it matter what I do?" cried Perdita flinging up her hands. "Whatever it is I am always wrong. Let me go away from you all, Thomasina. You will all be happier without me and I cannot be more miserable than I am! Let me go and never be heard of again."

"I have told you twenty times before, you owe everything to yourself," said Thomasina. "You

do everything that you ought not to do, and then you wonder that we do not like it. You make disgraceful friendships with people below us in station; you flirt and bring on a man like Mr. Brocklebank, who is not accustomed to such conduct, and when he makes you an offer you refuse him:—no, you need not look like that, Perdita; I know very well what has happened!—you are selfish and disobedient to mother; and when I want you to do as you ought and save her from a tremendous sorrow by concealing a thing that might kill her if she knew it, you fly into a rage and want to leave home! However, it is too late to argue now. All I beg you to understand is, that you are not to tell mother about Eva; and that if need be, you must bear the blame yourself rather than betray her."

Whereupon Thomasina left the room; and poor Perdita was once more free to eat out her heart in solitude and anguish.

What was told the mother Perdita never knew, and she dared not ask. So long as she was not brought face to face with any accusation, nor called on to tell a direct falsehood, she would bear blame where she had been innocent to save her sister, who had been guilty. Her savage love of truth would go no farther than this. She would let judgment go by default and not plead her innocence, but she would not say that she was guilty—no! not even to save her mother pain.

That something had been said which made her the scapegoat was evident enough when, after dinner the next day, Mrs. Winstanley said to her in a solemn judicial kind of way:

"Come here, Perdita. I have something of importance to say to you. After the disgrace of last night you cannot be surprised at what I am about to say," she began, speaking with severity but also with the difficulty of strong emotion.

Between chronic displeasure with an unruly daughter and active banishment from the family is a wide step, and one that no mother can take without reluctance and sorrow. And though Mrs. Winstanley thought herself bound to banish Perdita for the sake of Thomasina and Eva, still, it was an awful thing to do when the moment came; and she felt it.

Perdita looked at Thomasina; Thomasina looked at her. The soft humid tender eyes with their mingled pathos, terror and appeal met the elder sister's cold, steely, handsome orbs which dominated and silenced her. They seemed to defy her to remonstrate; to command her to submit; and Perdita's sank confused and overcome beneath their pitiless gaze.

"Things cannot go on like this," continued Mrs. Winstanley. "The very reputation of my family—of your sisters—is at stake. You are not only ruining yourself but us; and though you are my daughter, your sisters are also my daughters,

and I must think of them as well as of you. Once more I put it to you, as your last chance:—Will you give up these friends of yours—these common tradespeople, with whom you have made such a degrading and compromising intimacy? If you will, I will overlook all that has passed, disgraceful as it is; if you will not—for the sake of your sister and to maintain my own dignity and position, you must leave home."

"Mother! it would be giving up my life!" said Perdita.

The Crawfords were her only friends. In abandoning them would she not be giving up all that made life other than so much physical mechanism?

"Then you renounce your family?" said her mother with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Why need I do either? What does it signify to any of you what I do or who it is that I may know outside the house!" cried Perdita, beating the air for reasons.

"We have discussed all that before," said Mrs. Winstanley. "You talk wilful nonsense, Perdita, when you speak like this. It is your family or your friends. You cannot have both."

"Mother! mother!" cried Perdita, sitting down and hiding her face in her hands.

"Think well before you decide," said Mrs. Winstanley very mildly. "Think what you give up—what you choose instead of your mother, your

sisters, your natural friends, your father's family, my love, your own social position. Once done you can never retract—never!"

There was silence. Perdita was touched by her mother's unwonted gentleness of tone, gentle even while so firm. Her heart softened as it ever did when she was treated with humanity and tenderness. She hesitated, wept, lamented. It was all so shadowy, so intangible! Why might she not hold on by these new friends whom she loved, yet not be discarded by her own people? Why was she to be shut out like a pariah, disinherited, dishonoured, because Mrs. Crawford had a nephew who sold drugs by the ounce instead of by the pound?

Then said Mrs. Winstanley as a further indictment—she was not always wise:

"I am generous in allowing you this alternative, Perdita, after all that happened last night; but I promised your sister Thomasina that I would not speak of it to you, nor punish you as you deserve."

"What does Thomasina say did happen last night?" cried Perdita, flinging off the brooding doubt, the oppression of despair, the subjugation of her sister's looks and reasserting herself according to her wont. Here at last she came face to face with a fact. "What did she say I had done?"

"Leave that to me," said Mrs. Winstanley,

"She told me quite enough to warrant all that I am saying."

"Mother!——" cried Perdita excitedly; when Thomasina's clear calm voice broke in.

"Now, Perdita, keep silence," said the elder sister slowly.

"Why should I? I am to be turned out of the house because——" began Perdita, her colour rising and her voice deepening.

"Because you are a wilful wrong-headed girl," again interrupted her sister; "because you will not do as you ought, nor obey mother when she commands you. It has all been your own doing."

"No, Perdita, you are not turned out of the house, you turn yourself out," said Mrs. Winstanley. "At the eleventh hour I would forgive everything if you would come back to reason and propriety and give up those undesirable, those disastrous friends of yours."

"No, there is more than this," said Perdita. "You condemn me for what I have not done—it is not only the Crawfords."

"It is only the Crawfords—nothing but them," said Thomasina a little hurriedly. "Mother only asks you to give them up; and it is shameful in you that she should have to ask you at all—that you ever made the acquaintance in the first instance and that you have held to it for a moment after she desired you not."

Perdita put her face into her hands and thought.

It was asking her for her life—for all that made the hope, the charm, the consolation of her existence—for her confessed delight, her secret love. And to have in return—what?—unfriendliness and isolation, a dwelling-place but not a home, relations and not a family. She could not! She would rather accept the banishment which was but the seal of her lifelong loneliness. Away from them all and made dead, she would be no longer either a hindrance or an irritation; her absence would be their gain; and she — she could not be more miserable and she might easily be less so. And then, Leslie's adjuration that she would not give him up—come what might, that she would be faithful to her friends! No, it was impossible. She must stand by the true and forsake that which was only seeming—she must not give up the Crawfords.

She turned her face to her mother, not defiantly, but set and stern with her pain, and strong with the power of her love.

"No," she said in a low voice; "I cannot give them up. They are dearer to me than life itself!"

"Then you abandon your mother and sisters," said Mrs. Winstanley with the accent of one who has finished the business on hand and pronounced the final word. "I knew that harm would come of this horrid office life—this disgraceful rambling about the streets by yourself; and I was right.

Now go upstairs and pack your things. I will put you into lodgings to-morrow, with Miss Cluff as your chaperon. Insolent and disobedient as you are, you are my daughter, and I will do my duty to the last!"

"Go, Perdita," said Thomasina, who saw that her mother was breaking down, and who dreaded nothing so much as her distress.

"Poor darling Mumsey, but we love you!" said Eva, putting her arms round her mother's neck and kissing her.

And for the moment her caress was perfectly sincere. She forgot all that had been done whereof she herself was the starting-point, and remembered only that she loved her mother and wanted to make up to her by her own sweetness for the sorrow which that horrid Perdita had caused her. Feeling is a fact truly, but it is a fact like coloured glass. The landscape is not quite the same when looked at through a yellow pane as when looked at through a blue one; and just now Eva's feelings were in the highest degree transforming.

Here then was an end of all things and Perdita's fate finally fixed. She was to be banished from home not only for what she had done but for what she had not done—not only because she was yoked to her own misdeeds but also in some mysterious way saddled with Eva's. And she had to keep silence and bear with the dig-

nity of a martyr condemnation which she had not earned, save in that general way by which her ill-luck had laid her open to perpetual condemnation ever since she had become an individuality at all.

The root of it all was want of money. Had Mrs. Winstanley not been so much in debt and so poor, the efficient settlement of her daughters would not have been a matter of such vital interest. Perdita's comparative plainness would not have been such a loss, as the beauty of the other two would not have been so important an investment; hence she would not have been left so much to herself to think without guidance, to act without control; perhaps she would have been less democratic—and yet, her democracy was in her very blood! it was bone of her bone and flesh or her flesh—and she would certainly not have been thrown on the sympathy and friendship of people in a lower social sphere like the Crawfords, or of those in a different phase of thought like Bell Blount. Yes, it was all due to those velvet rags and Mrs. Winstanley's natural desire to retain the velvet and hide the rags.

Thomasina confessed the whole thing in her self-communings when making up her mind how to act. She was very sorry for Perdita; but there was no other way to save all than by sacrificing her. It would never do to let mother know the truth about that foolish little Eva. She was the

biggest prize and she must be well married. She was a fool—there was no doubt of that—and a naughty fool too; but Thomasina knew that she did not mean all the harm into which her folly would have led her, and that even this last and most dangerous escapade meant silliness and what she chose to think was love, not vice or anything horrible. Perdita was a family disaster, if a good girl in herself; and she was sure to bring them into disgrace. It was no use saving her for the common weal; she was useless; and it was better to let her be sacrificed even if unjustly than that Eva should bear the penalty of her own misdeeds, whereby they would all be ruined outright. We all have to suffer one for the other, thought Thomasina—down to lambs and those poor little singing birds! A few pet beasts are sacred; but only a few; and for the rest the whole scheme of life is sacrifice, the whole law suffering. It was very sad and she was really sorry.

Tears were in her eyes as she thought of poor Perdita and all that she would suffer. But it must be. It was better that she should be unhappy than that mother should be broken-hearted and the family ruined; and if she would keep up with those chemist people she had better keep up with them out of the house and where the family were not implicated, than while living at home and tainting them all with the same low-bred strain.

With which reasoning Thomasina, the incarnation of common sense, justified herself. No kinder than fate, no softer than law, she followed as her reason led, and acted on the axiom of the greatest happiness for the greatest number as steadily as the most enlightened political economist could desire. It was by no fault of hers if that axiom included the victimization of the innocent. When was it otherwise? What had the poor scapegoat done to be laden with the sins of a people? and why should Andromeda be chained to a rock, that the mass of the multitude might be saved? So with Perdita. She was the ballast flung out to lighten the sinking ship—Andromeda devoted to sacrifice that her mother and sisters might be saved—the scapegoat driven off into the desert laden with sins not her own—all that judgment might be averted and destruction staved off where, though it was due, it would fall so much more heavily!

Yes, Thomasina had done well, according to her lights; now to finish this tough piece of work, and bring Bois-Duval to a sense of his guilt and to the relinquishment of his prey.

CHAPTER XV.

TO THE RESCUE.

WHAT a miserable breakfast it was! Eva was in bed, half offended, half frightened by the severe scolding that Thomasina had given her yesterday; Mrs. Winstanley had a headache, and might be marked dangerous; Thomasina was pale, glacial, inscrutable; and Perdita had the swollen eyes and parti-coloured complexion of one who has not slept and who has cried all through the night. It was a very nexus of distress for every one alike, and to Mrs. Winstanley it was as if she had touched the ground.

The breakfast passed in silence; only when she was leaving to go to her office did Perdita break through the uncomfortable stillness of the hour.

"What am I to do, mother?" she said with a sob in her voice. "Am I to find lodgings for myself, or come back here, or what am I to do?"

"Come back here. I will have found a place for you," answered Mrs. Winstanley, not looking at her daughter.

Her maternal instinct had never been strongly excited for this uncomfortable rebel; still it was there—if in a very minor degree, all the same it was there.

"Good-bye mother," then said Perdita beginning to tremble.

"I shall see you again. You need not take leave in this formal manner," said Mrs. Winstanley brusquely.

She did not mean this as unkindness. On the contrary her very brusqueness was a kind of self-defence against breaking down on her own side. But Perdita read it as a snub, and left for her work with a heart more sore and sad than need have been.

"That poor misguided child!" said Mrs. Winstanley with a curious mixture of anger and distress.

"She is terribly annoying," answered Thomasina quietly. "But you must not fret, dearest mother. When Eva and I are married things will be quite different then. She will have had a lesson; we shall not be here to make you feel the difference between us and her; and then she can do the family no mischief."

"You forget this dreadful chemist," cried Mrs. Winstanley. "The disgraceful mystery of the night before last—where could she have been going at that hour of the night, Thomasina?—the terrible chance there is of her marrying him. No; things will not be put entirely to rights even when you and Eva are married! And when will that be?" she sighed to herself with the sickness of deferred hope.

"If she does marry him of course we must

discard her," said Thomasina. "That will be a necessity for our self-respect. But perhaps she will not go so far as that. And at all events she cannot marry him just yet, so that we have time before us."

Mrs. Winstanley smiled. It was but a pale and watery kind of smile truly, still it was better than the former look of grim despair. She sighed as well as smiled.

"You always cheer me, Thomasina," she said. "You have a wonderful knack of putting things in the best light. I only hope that this time you may prove a true prophet."

"Believe, mother; that is better than hoping," her daughter said, answering back her smile but not her sigh.

And now something else had to be done, and Thomasina was the one who must do it. It was a bold step to take; but when matters are desperate boldness is the best policy; and matters were desperate enough now! This foolish wickedness between Eva and Bois-Duval was of even more consequence than the rebel's craze for the chemist. It must be put a stop to at once and Thomasina was the only one to do it. Mother must know nothing about it; Eva could not be trusted to break off the affair; she would promise 'mountains and seas,' but she would break her word while the breath was warm on her lips; and Perdita was of course out of the question. In any family matter

whatever, where nice handling and delicate diplomacy was needed, that tactless savage was worse than useless. No, Thomasina herself was the only one who could undertake the business of the moment; and she made up her mind what to do, bold, hazardous, extreme as her action might be.

"Mother," she said, soon after the last word on Perdita had been spoken; "I am going to Mrs. Merton, if you have no objection. I will be back before luncheon. We can look for Perdita's lodgings in the afternoon if you do not mind my going to Mrs. Merton now."

"Certainly, my dear, go if you like," answered Mrs. Winstanley, not expressing any kind of surprise.

She believed in her daughter's good sense, and felt sure she had a wise reason for all that she did, even though things might look odd. Therefore when she said that she would go and see Mrs. Merton in uncanonical hours, Mrs. Winstanley assented without opposition, merely saying:

"Go if you like; and give her my kind regards."

Thomasina kissed her mother as she left the room; dressed herself with care; put a thick black Shetland veil into her pocket; and drove off in a close cab—not to Mrs. Merton's house but to M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval's hotel. It was a tremendous thing to do; but Thomasina had calculated closely. It was just the kind of thing that would

touch the imaginative chivalry of a Frenchman; and Bois-Duval, though unscrupulous and dishonourable, had his high lights like the rest of us. And more than this—it flattered his vanity that this frosty Venus, this impenetrable and excellent Thomasina should thus put herself in his power, should abase herself so far before him, should trust so grandly to his generosity, to his honour as a Frenchman, to his dignity of man. When the lady closely veiled, who had been ushered into the room where he sat in gorgeous dressing-gown and slippers flirting with his coffee and toying with his roll, took off that Shetland mask from before her face, and showed the clear-cut handsome frozen features of Thomasina Winstanley, he knew what was before him as clearly as if the scene had been already rehearsed. And he admired her courage. Pardi! it was un-French, but it was sublime! As he stood with all his Gallic grace and gallantry, bowing low and asking to what was he indebted for the honour of this visit? and would she not do him the honour of sitting down?—he half wondered for a moment whether this excellent young lady had gone down before him like so many others, and if she had come for herself among other things. But he did not wonder long. Thomasina was not the person to allow false impressions to remain when they were not part of her plan.

"Thank you," she said, deliberately choosing the most comfortable chair in the apartment, and

the one where she could dispose herself and her train with most grace.

Had it been Perdita, she would have thought it carrying meat to idols—confessing Satan—had she sat down and made herself comfortable in the room of the abhorred—had she prepared for a quiet argument on social expediency, or done anything but stand like a sentinel in defence of outraged virtue, while denouncing the sinner like a Pythoness.

"M. le Vicomte," said Thomasina when she had comfortably seated and gracefully adjusted herself; "I have come to speak to you about my sister Eva."

Her voice was as quiet, her manner as composed as usual; two burning spots on her cheeks alone showing that she was not quite so cold as that famous 'carved lady on a monument.'

Bois-Duval smiled and bowed.

"The charming child!" he said almost paternally.

"You know, M. le Vicomte, you do not intend to marry her," continued Thomasina, just in the same cold quiet unimpressional way. She would have shown more interest had she been speaking of a new gown or a day's pleasure. But what was the use of hysterics? She wanted the thing settled, and it was far better to take it up on a common-sense basis and in a business-like manner than to dash off into Pindarics either of crimination or entreaty.

"I could scarcely aspire to the honour of Mademoiselle Eva's charming hand," said Bois-Duval with profound self-abasement.

A look of scorn shot from Thomasina's eyes.

"Just so. But as things are you stand in the way of her marrying any one else," she said.

He spread out his hands in graceful deprecation.

"Mademoiselle," he said; "you afflict me; and you surprise as much as you afflict. The little Eva is but a child to me—charming, gracious, adorable, but only on the threshold—an ingénue in the freshness and charm of her innocence, but for anything deeper or nearer, the idea until now has never presented itself to my mind."

"Granted; I accept your version, M. le Vicomte. But having now received another from me—having heard from me the deliberate statement that your attentions are disastrous to the future well-being and your presence here is hindering the fit establishment of my little sister, will you not act with the proverbial chivalry of your nation and efface yourself? Will you not leave England at once—this very day? I appeal to you as a man of society. You know the vital necessity of a good marriage for a young girl like Eva, without fortune, and fatherless." Here Thomasina raised her eyes with a sudden flash that seemed almost to scorch the man's heart by its intensity of scorn.

"An excellent chance is lying at her feet, and

nothing but the disturbing influence of your presence stands in the way of her immediate acceptance."

"Your demand is somewhat sudden, mademoiselle," said Bois-Duval, as gravely as if all this was true—as indeed it was in substance if not in form. "I have business in London which demands my attention. To leave so à l'improviste——"

He looked from the ceiling to the floor and back again, as if between the two lay the obstacle to his going.

"Your business surely may wait for a short time," she urged. "As soon as Eva is married there can be no objection to your coming back. It is only until then—to remove the charm and fascination which unfortunately you exercise over her, and which you yourself, as a man of honour, a true Frenchman, know is unutterably disastrous, seeing that you do not intend to marry her yourself."

Bois-Duval was touched. This kind of reasoning—the only kind that would have moved him at the right place.

"Mademoiselle, you are fit to be the leader of a political salon!" he said with admiration, almost with enthusiasm. "I yield to your reasoning. It is sublime. I will not be an obstacle to the marriage of the little Eva. A Frenchman knows how to retire—to suffer, if need be, for the good of another, and that other an adorable child like the little Eva! Pray assure yourself of

my fidelity to my promise. I leave London to-night. Perhaps fate will permit me to renew my friendship with your charming family, when, if the little one is married, our intercourse will be freer."

His eyes flashed when he said this. He thought it a master-stroke. The secret threat which underlay it indemnified him somewhat for the substantial checkmate that he had received.

"When she is married she will then be her husband's care, and we shall not have the responsibility," said Thomasina. "Till then our mother, and I, as her eldest sister, are her guardians; and our first duty is to marry her according to her beauty and social standing."

"Just so," said Bois-Duval. "And believe me, mademoiselle, it would be better for English society in general if more eldest sisters thought as you do and acted with the decision and good sense that you have shown."

"Thank you," she said coldly. "Fortunately however, it is not often needed in society," added somewhat enigmatically. Hazy grammar makes a safe kind of veil when it is not desirable to show a thought too clearly. "Then I have accomplished my mission, M. le Vicomte?" she said, after a short pause. "You leave London to-night; and you swear not to write to Eva"—she stopped herself at the "again" which very nearly tumbled

over the heels of her sister's name—"nor to make any attempt to see her?"

"On the honour of a Frenchman!" was his answer, putting his hand on his heart.

"I have no more to say," said Thomasina rising from her chair. "Adieu, M. le Vicomte. I trust to your promise. Bon voyage."

"Adieu, mademoiselle," he answered—"mademoiselle the peerless."

He made a profound bow; his face was full of genuine admiration. Had she wept or raved, reproached him with his conduct or threatened him with its consequences, had she declared what she knew or defied him to excuse himself, had she done any of the wildly sincere and generously passionate things which Perdita would have done, she would not have had the smallest influence over him. He might have promised anything and everything to gain time and end strife; but he would not have stirred an inch from his design. But this quiet immorality, this cynical good sense, this apotheosis of worldly wisdom, penetrated him through and through with respect; and he yielded to her as to a mistress in the art where he too aspired to be a master.

He half forcibly took her hand and kissed it.

"Mademoiselle, you are divine!" he said with ardour.

Thomasina shuddered and instinctively wiped her hand. Proud, pure, cold as she was, it was

contamination to have been touched by his lips even through the protecting glove. If to him she was a divinely beautiful and gifted woman, mistress of his most sacred art, of the highest grade in his highest school of social philosophy, to her he was only a human reptile to be cajoled out of her path merely because she was not strong enough to crush him beneath her heel. Cajoled or crushed he was nothing but a reptile, and his touch made her shudder. She turned away; and at the door which he held open for her made him a stately courtesy—as stately as the courtesy of a queen acknowledging the service of a vassal; then slowly descended the stairs, feeling as if she had come out of some terrible conflict where the stakes had been for life or death;—and had come out victorious. She had discomfited the most deadly enemy of their family fortunes; saved her mother from heart-break and her sister from shame; packed up the sin that could not be denied in a neat little parcel which she had strapped on to innocent but befitting shoulders; and had cleared the way for Sir James Kearney to take when it should please him to walk down the Via Sacra of matrimony.

Thomasina knew but little of the pain that follows on bad actions and an uneasy conscience; she knew almost as little of that inner glow which accompanies meritorious effort and sacrifice of the finer sort. But to-day she did feel that inner glow.

She had done her duty bravely and heroically and she deserved well of fame and fate.

She drove off to Mrs. Merton's, jubilant in heart if just as calm in bearing as was her wont; with the feeling of a gambler in luck, as if all that she did must succeed and she had only to go in and sweep the board.

Mrs. Merton was at home. She was rather surprised to see this incarnation of social propriety at such an unconventional hour; but when Thomasina explained to her that they wanted to secure her for an afternoon which they were about to give, with music and recitations to amuse the blasés, then she accepted the innovation as a personal compliment, and was quite prettily touched by the friendliness and grace of the girl's action.

"What does she mean by it? What does she expect to make by me?" thought Mrs. Merton to herself, while smiling and purring, thanking Miss Winstanley with such nice soft comfortable warmth and saying how glad she should be to go.

"And you will be sure to bring Sir James Kearney as your bodyguard?" said Thomasina with a flattering insinuation of Mrs. Merton's superior power in that direction. "There is to be a young débutante in whose success my mother has taken great interest, and we want Sir James to hear her. She has a magnificent voice; and we know how fond Sir James is of music. Mother prefers her voice to Nilsson's."

"Is she pretty?" asked Mrs. Merton carelessly.

"Not very," answered Thomasina. "She would have too much if, with her voice and genius, she had beauty too! She would leave nothing for others!"

"No, it is a wise dispensation of Providence that geniuses are so seldom pretty," said Mrs. Merton. "Homeliness has the brains and beauty goes without."

"But sometimes pretty people are clever enough," said Thomasina a little drily.

She knew that she herself was pretty; and she thought that she had just been very clever.

"Not often," insisted Mrs. Merton lazily. "Look at your two sisters for instance—a case in point. See what a beautiful little creature Eva is, but no one would call her clever; just as no one would call your sister Perdita, who is so clever, pretty."

"That is not quite a case in point," drawled Thomasina. "For Eva is no fool; and Perdita would be really quite charming if she would but take pains with herself and make the most of her points."

"My dear, she has no points to make the best of," said Mrs. Merton. "How she came to be the sister of you and Eva is always a mystery to me. What could your mother have been thinking of!" she added naïvely.

"She has the kind of face which those who like her think handsome, and those who do not

like her call plain," said Thomasina. "As I like her very much in spite of all her oddities I think her handsome, my poor Perdita!—but very unformed and not set off."

Mrs. Merton raised her eyebrows and made no answer. And as just at this moment the little indicator, which clicked in the drawing-room when the visitor's bell rang downstairs, gave its warning sound, there was something else beside Perdita's comparative beauty or plainness to discuss.

"That must be my brother," she said quietly, raising her sleepy eyes to Thomasina's face.

"We have not seen him very lately," answered the girl quite as quietly. Again she felt as the gambler in luck when he stakes and knows beforehand that he shall win. "And really," she added with the finest and nicest shade of tenderness that was ever thrown into a face and voice; "I can hardly understand life without Mr. Brocklebank taking some part in it. He has been such a good friend to us."

"He is very staunch when he once takes up people," answered Mrs. Merton as the door opened and Benjamin appeared.

Clarissa rose to meet her brother; after a moment's hesitation Thomasina rose too. It was against the rules of conventional propriety, but the ironmaster was a man whom it was wiser to soften rather than to pique. Those fared best with him who expected least from, and did the

most for, him; and Thomasina understood this clearly.

"We have not seen you for such a long time!" she said, lifting up her beautiful brown eyes and smiling with that lovely smile of hers which was like a subtle perfume interpenetrating the whole atmosphere.

"Miss Winstanley is very good," said Benjamin stiffly; "but sometimes absence is more desirable than association; and perhaps I have imposed myself once too often on the family at No. 100."

"No; that would be impossible," said Thomasina with divine sweetness. "We are constant people at our house and never weary of our friends."

"You may disappoint them," answered Mr. Brocklebank with a certain gloomy irritation the meaning of which Thomasina understood only too well.

She smiled again with increased sweetness.

"Not intentionally," she said. "Believe me, none of us, from mother to Eva and down to our very servants, would annoy you intentionally. I hope no one has done so by inadvertence. Oh! I remember now, you were displeased with Perdita the other night? She was obstinate and tiresome and would not do as you wished her about these new friends of hers? But then, you see that is just Perdita! If she has made up her mind that such and such a thing is right, no power on earth

can move her. But you must not visit her eccentricities on us!" she added in a pleading voice and almost caressing manner—decidedly caressing for such a frosty Venus as she was.

"Miss Perdita is a very wrong-headed young lady," said Benjamin severely.

"Yes," sighed Thomasina; "very; but true-hearted," she added. "She has fallen under bad influences of late, and the very strength and loyalty of her character give these people power over her. It is a great pity. We are all so much grieved!"

"I know nothing about all that," said the ironmaster disdainfully. "I only know that she does not recognize her friends or understand her duties, and that I have done with her—washed my hands of her. She may sink or swim as she can, for me; I will not trouble myself about her again."

"But I hope that we shall not all share in your displeasure?" said Thomasina with a suspicion of pathos in her voice.

"My dear, will you excuse me for a moment? I have some household business to attend to," said Mrs. Merton, lounging up from her comfortable chair. "Benjamin, as Thomasina is here"—she did not often call the young queen so familiarly by her name—"she can entertain you till I come back. You won't mind?"

"No," said Thomasina gently; and "No," said Benjamin decidedly.

"And how are things progressing at West Hill Gardens?" asked the iron merchant in a confidential way, when his sister had left the room. He brought his chair a few feet nearer to Thomasina's.

"I cannot say very well," answered Thomasina: "and as I feel you ought to know everything about us, dear Mr. Brocklebank, I am so glad that I have met you this morning. I should like to tell you all."

"I hope Miss Winstanley has nothing very unpleasant to narrate," was the grave response.

"Indeed, not much else," she said. "Mother has decided to send Perdita away from home for a little time. She will be better for a change, and perhaps the strange influence that is now over her will be broken. At all events, she is going with our old governess, Miss Cluff—and that is the first thing to tell you."

Mr. Brocklebank gave a sigh of relief.

"It is well," he said. "I am glad of it."

"And then the old pecuniary strain continues," said Thomasina, still quiet and gentle. "Mother is so brave and good about everything, it almost breaks my heart to see her, knowing as I do what she is suffering. Poor Perdita having turned out so unsatisfactorily—having misused her freedom so terribly—tries her very much; and then this

dreadful loss of money! Oh, Mr. Brocklebank—you who know everything and can do everything—put me in the way of earning money so that I can help my mother!"

How lovely her eyes looked with that clever artificial tenderness, that histrionic pathos thrown into them! Benjamin felt his veins tingle as he gazed into the superb face that looked into his, all its pride softened, all its coldness melted. Had he made a mistake? Had he chosen the less and left the greater and the better? Was it too late to repair that mistake? He had never been quite sure, he said to himself; and perhaps Thomasina had been the magnet all along, even when he had suffered himself to be deflected by her sister.

"If Miss Winstanley chooses she can save all," he said in a low voice.

"How?" asked Thomasina with sweet unconsciousness; but a little tremor passed over her and she turned deadly pale.

"I will write to her this evening and tell her," said Benjamin Brocklebank.

"And not now?" she said, still playing at unconsciousness.

"I will write," he repeated huskily.

She looked at him again with eyes as innocent as Eva's. Then something seemed to come into them that made her drop them as if struck with secret shyness and the sweet shame of maidenly love. Yet the quivering of her lips and the shiver

that ran through her were in flat contradiction to this shy sweet shame. The one spoke of bliss—the other betokened agony. Between the two which was true?

That evening a letter came to Thomasina in Benjamin Brocklebank's well-known hand-writing. When she had read it she went up to her mother and put her arms round her neck.

"Mother, you are saved!" she said in a low voice, but firm as the voice of a strong heart braced to sacrifice. "Mr. Brocklebank has asked me to marry him."

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Winstanley, letting her work drop from her hands. "Thank God, who has protected me!" she repeated piously, believing what she said and that the Eternal had mingled in her affairs so that she might not have to suffer for her own misdeeds of extravagance and folly. "My own good child! my own dear girl! Ah, what a blessing you have always been to me, my Thomasina! What should I have done without you! What do I not owe you!"

"You owe me nothing, mother," her daughter answered quietly. "I have only done my duty."

"But how unlike your poor sister Perdita! She might have saved me too, and she would not. Oh, Thomasina, if I could once feel safe and free! If I could but have you and Eva well married and all my debts paid off!"

"You shall, mother," said Thomasina. "We

will get you straight and well provided for; and Eva shall marry Sir James. The beginning of the end has come."

"And you do not dislike him?—say you are not making too great a sacrifice!" said Mrs. Winstanley, holding her daughter's hand in hers.

Thomasina turned away abruptly.

"Do not let us speak of that," she said hastily and with a shudder she could not hide. Then she turned back to her mother fondly. "Do not trouble yourself about me, mother," she said with a brave smile. "I like him quite well enough to marry him and make him a good wife. And you will be happy!"

She said this just as Mrs. Merton, discussing the Winstanley family with her brother, and repeating to him what she had said to Thomasina about the apportionment of beauty and brains between Eva and Perdita, wound up by saying with a smile:

"I should have excepted Thomasina herself, for she is both beautiful and clever—the cleverest woman I know, out and out."

"And the most fortunate," replied Benjamin enigmatically.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOOKING UP.

MATERNAL instinct—the divine Storge by which the world is saved—was not strong enough with Mrs. Winstanley to overcome her personal distaste to the habits and principles of her democratic daughter; still, though entirely unsympathetic she wished to be pre-eminently just, and if less than maternal to be in nowise wanting in consideration. Indeed she prided herself on her justice as the moral equivalent of personal politeness; and she would have been as ashamed to have done any one a wrong as to have committed a breach of good manners. Passion and wilful prejudice were to her essentially the ill-breeding of morality; though righteous chastisement smoothly administered was the rebuff which a self-respecting dignity both allows and enjoins. She would have thought herself to blame had she suffered to pass unrebuked conduct that fell short of her standard of propriety. All the same there are ways of doing things; and Mrs. Winstanley was a stickler for ways.

She really was a good woman according to her lights. The whole contention lay in the quality of those lights, and whether they were such as man may walk by to the profit of his soul, or to

be avoided as only marsh-lights flickering over morasses and the graves of the dead.

Perdita was to be banished; but she should be banished with all due regard to decorum and the safe keeping of the family linen. She should be put into lodgings, with poor old Cluff to throw the gauze of respectable appearances about her; and she should not be entirely cut off from her friends. She was to be removed as one would remove a barrel of gunpowder from the hearth before the fire; but they would sometimes go to see her, and she should come and see them when no one else was here or likely to come. So long as she kept herself from irremediable disgrace she should receive such moral support from her family as she could find in this kind of intercourse. If she did worse than she had done already, she should be cut off without reprieve, and buried out of sight without even an *In Memoriam* to mark that she had once lived in their affections.

This was how things were to be ordered; and when Perdita came home in the evening she found that all had been prepared for her exodus, and that she had nothing left but to accept the portion assigned to her. Old Cluff had been retained for the cost of her board and lodging; dingy but supremely respectable rooms had been found for a moderate rent in the ancient district of Lamb's Conduit Street—far enough removed from West-Hill Gardens to make the crossing of the several

orbits exceedingly improbable; and Perdita was told that this was to be her home till the family history had somewhat settled itself and her eccentric fireworks of talk and action were not so full of peril as now. This was doing the best for every one, according to Mrs. Winstanley's ideas, and padding the burden laid on the poor scapegoat with the softest wool at command.

It was a trial when it came. That was only natural. Mothers are mothers even if the maternal instinct is stunted; and daughters are daughters though the lines of thought do run at right angles to each other and the sons of God are the sons of Belial to the other. Perdita, for all her love of freedom and hatred of shams, wept at leaving Home; and Mrs. Winstanley, for all her sense of relief from danger, wept at banishing one who was part of herself—lopping off a limb though by no means a handsome one.

But it had to be done; and it was done. After the due amount of tears and assurances of frequent intercourse—with a sudden afflux of softness all round, and some difficulty in holding to resolution as against ruth—the sacrifice was accomplished; and Perdita drove away with her boxes like a discarded servant setting out for a new place. Even little Eva whimpered and Thomasina's perfect self-possession was shaken for a moment; but nothing came of the tears which glistened in the blue eyes of the one, nor of the

quiver which disturbed the pale lips of the other; and the cab rolled off carrying the banished rebel to poor old Cluff and those dingy rooms in Lamb's Conduit Street.

Discarded like a dishonest servant; banished from her home and her family; thrust out as a moral leper; removed as a danger and a nuisance; —and why? Because she believed that certain principles of life were righteous and holy, and said what she thought—because she feared God rather than man—honoured truth before expediency, obeyed her conscience sooner than social observances. It was not for her faults that she was punished, but for her faithfulness to the higher law as taught her by her conscience. And when she realized this she felt that despair which overtakes us all when we are dealt with unjustly—that despair which makes us lose our faith in man's goodness and God's providence alike.

Days passed and Perdita made no sign, put in no appearance, save at the office, where she went to work as usual. She was not sulking, though it looked as if she were; she was only ashamed and grieving. She shrank even from the Crawfords. To have to tell them that she had been turned out of her house was a trial to her pride which she was cowardly enough to delay the longest possible. And something beside cowardice held her back. Too much and too little had been said to make it easy for her to seek them

of her own accord. Yearn as she might to see Leslie Crawford again—faithful to their friendship as she had proved herself already and meant to be to the end—it was not for her, she thought, to put herself in his way unsought. She was too sore all over not to be proud and almost distrustful; wherefore, at this time of trial when they might have been of the sweetest consolation to her, she herself deserted these dear friends and added to her pain by unnecessary self-torture. On her side Bell Blount had abandoned this poor rebel who had been as recalcitrant to the vanguard as in the rear ranks. The Champion of her sex could have nothing to do with a spiritless creature who coquetted with the other side and honoured the enemy. So that neither was Prince Christian's Road a place of refuge for Perdita in her banishment; and she was cut off from the stirring sophistries of Bell Blount as completely as from the more cramped logic of Mrs. Crawford.

Thus the first days in her new home were melancholy enough; and she more than once wondered where the charm of freedom was to be found. How unlike the time when she and poor old Cluff had kept house together in the summer —with little to spend and less to save—but where Hope had been the protagonist holding the stage while love was waiting for his time to appear! Then, insufficiency had been heroic, because voluntary and undertaken for a good purpose; now,

it was enforced, and degrading because enforced. Then, though the room in which they lived had been shabby and bare, still there had been books about, the house was fresh and spacious and had both the aroma of refinement and the sentiment of home. And though London in August and September is dusty, parched and stifling all through, yet the atmosphere was clearer in a new district like West Hill than farther down towards the City and the East End; the common Garden was a resource, and Kensington Gardens—*the* Gardens *par excellence*—were always delicious and a very lovely substitute for nature.

Now all was on a lower level—infinitely lower. Squalid children played about the door and made their Tom Tiddler's ground of the steps and street; the landlady was a pinched and parched old maid who could scarcely get a living for herself out of her poor venture, because of all that she had to do for a wretched sister left a widow with six children and never a penny to buy them bread; the maid-of-all-work was grimy, unkempt, inapt; and the lodgers above and below were people who said "kyows" when they spoke of cows; and one had even perpetrated the iniquity of "which you was." The whole thing was mean and wretched to an excess; but it was of the highest order of respectability in its own poor grade, and Perdita's acquaintances were not likely to be scandalized by her surroundings, seeing that she had none to

scandalize. It was all unspeakably doleful from first to last; but the days had to be lived through whatever their complexion, and strength is only of value according to the strain that it can bear.

But if she were miserable how clear and wide her going had made the old home to those left within it! It was as if the place had grown suddenly larger, not to speak of safer—as if a huge obstrusive log lying across the threshold had been flung clear away out of the door—as if a packet of explosives had been taken from before the drawing-room fire. Such a feeling of security from anxiety sprang up in the place of annoyance and danger! It was the lifting of the fog, the clearing of the clouds, the dying away of the tempest; and those who had formerly been darkened and oppressed were now proportionately enlivened and relieved.

Meanwhile the poor cause of the oppressive fog, the miserable source of the disturbing tempest, gloomed and sorrowed and smarted and wept in her shabby little rooms in Lamb's Conduit Street; and poor old Cluff said: "My dear, do eat a little more," twenty times in vain; and: "My dear, it breaks my heart to see you so sad," about as often and to no better purpose.

No one openly confessed the relief that had come upon them all save Eva, who when it suited her had Perdita's directness if not her truth; and she gave utterance to the voiceless sentiment com-

mon to them all by throwing up her arms as one who has just laid down a heavy weight and saying with a short laugh:

"How comfortable it is without that funny old Per! What a temper she has; and how cross she gets about nothing!"

"Leave Perdita alone, Eva; she is not here to annoy you or to defend herself," said Thomasina with quiet sternness.

Eva flushed at her eldest sister's rebuke, reading in it more than was patent to the mother who merely wondered at her good daughter's severity. She pouted just a little to give herself countenance and take off the appearance of embarrassment, but she held her tongue as commanded. Yet if Ina did not mind what she was about she would get to dislike her as much as she disliked that disagreeable old Per, thought the rosebud to herself; and then where would she be?

The afternoon tea which Thomasina had arranged so cleverly came off in due course; and really, as Mrs. Winstanley confessed, she felt as if she could breathe freely to-day. There was no danger of that poor dear misguided child coming in and disgracing them all as she did in that dreadful way when Lady Kearney had called. It was quite a relief to feel safe.

Over and above this feeling of safety because of the rebel's absence, the gathering itself was eminently successful. Mrs. Merton and Sir James

Kearney came—together; but Benjamin Brocklebank was not there. He had gone down to Armour Court; as Lady Kearney had gone to Hibberton, though not for the same reason, which on her side was simply to avoid the Winstanleys and this party. Many others, however, filled up the gaps created by these two, and made a crowd such as Londoners love. And among them came Agnes Disney and her mother, to confirm the final destruction of the meshes woven about Hubert and his broad acres by announcing his approaching marriage fixed for next week. They also came to evidence the magnanimity of the victors who can afford to be generous to the slain.

At the first Sir James was cold and stiff. He was jealous by nature and spoilt by admiration; and he thought himself a precious vase moulded out of finer clay than that which makes the ordinary human pipkin. Hence, he thought that all things which he desired should be kept sacred for aught which he had marked with the broad arrow of his fancy. He had been shocked by the discovery of Hubert's love for Eva. It offended his sense of honour in relation to Maud; wherein he was right; and gave him the impression of poaching on his own estate. When transacted in fur and feathers he held poaching to be one of the seven deadly sins, deserving a punishment not far short of hanging; when brought into homes, with pretty girls for partridges, he thought it an offence

demanding expulsion from the club and warning off the racecourse. Moreover, he held the rational theory that no smoke can rise without some fire underneath; and his pride was revolted to think that both Bois-Duval and Hubert Strangways should have been laying sticks under the cauldron which he had decided to boil for his own pleasure.

Altogether things were undeniably disagreeable for the young baronet, and he kept even step with those things. He was so gloomy and grumpy and horrid, that even Mrs. Winstanley's patience got strained and her well-oiled hinges began to creak. He had come with Mrs. Merton; and he devoted himself to her alone; sitting by her as persistently as if they had been Siamese twins; when forced to make conversational excursions, returning to his former attitude of exclusive devotion and the unseen apron-string, as if that had been a *corvée* and this was his delight.

But human resolution is a very frail kind of thing when sandwiched between a pretty woman and a young man's fancy, Eva was too lovely to be shunted, too coaxing and bewitching to be laid aside when it was her whim to be taken up. She had the power of a veritable witch to make things seem different from what they were, and as she chose they should appear.

Her wildflower face was so guileless, her blue eyes so ingenuous, her manner so simple, her af-

fectionateness so transparent! She was such a bewitching combination of cleverness and simplicity, of childish grace and womanly charm, of harmless little sensualities—how the red ripe lips closed over bonbons, and the white sharp little teeth buried themselves in the fleshy pulp of fruit!—and of naïve innocence of evil, that no man with a man's heart in him could fail to be touched when she chose to stir him. And if there had been such a one it was not Sir James Kearney. Then too Mrs. Winstanley was so charming and Thomasina was so delightful! The little witch—no, the little goddess—was to be forgiven something for the sake of her people as well as for her own sweet self; and when Mrs. Winstanley, changing her tone, laid aside a little of her extreme suavity and let her well-oiled hinges creak, Sir James, who was always more or less in opposition, suddenly became amiable, smoothed down his bristles and unrolled himself from his hedgehoglike mental attitude as if a miracle had been worked free of charge.

Ho soon came to the point of touching the secret core of his displeasure; which was a concession and the first step to reconciliation; and so Mrs. Winstanley understood it.

"You have had that scoundrel Bois-Duval here, I find!" he said, holding his head high, and curling his long thin upper lip.

"He has been in England, and he came here

once," said Mrs. Winstanley, who had the wisdom of never telling unnecessary untruths.

"Why did you receive him?" exclaimed Sir James irritably. "He should have been kicked out of the house."

"Well, you see, my servant did not know him!" answered Mrs. Winstanley with a pleasant smile. "It was only after he had made good his entrance that I was able to tell him my doors were closed against him."

"And you did say that?—you did then turn him out of your house?" he asked excitedly.

"M. le Vicomte de Bois-Duval will not enter my house again!" was her dignified reply.

Why did the moisture start so suddenly on Eva's smooth forehead and short curved upper lip? This dull November day was cold and chill, but she took a fan from the table and fanned herself as if she had been under a tropical sun.

"I fell in with some people who knew him well," said Sir James looking round disdainfully. "He is a bad lot all round—a man of utterly worthless character, loaded with debt, suspected of dishonesty at cards and cheating at races, a Viscount by birth and a blackleg by life. His acquaintance is a disgrace and an insult to any nice girl!"

He almost shouted when he said this, looking out of the corner of his eye at Eve whose flushed face kept its muscles as tranquil as if it had been

a wall covered with roses. The betrayal of colour was in it—no more.

"What a pity it is that so many foreigners are so disreputable!" said Mrs. Winstanley, gliding off into safe generalities and British virtues.

"And what a pity it is that English women are so easily taken in by them!" said Sir James with uncontrollable irritation. "Any scoundrel with his foreign false veneer goes down before an English gentleman of worth and substance, who would scorn to flatter as he does, but who would perhaps do more in the long run!"

"Yes, indeed, that is quite true with a certain kind of Englishwomen—not with the best kind, but with a very large class," said Mrs. Winstanley with sublime tranquillity.

She was an excellent discourser on social ethics—always ready for a hand at that safe rubber! Sir James looked at Eva. She was playing with the kitten—that eternal resource! fanning herself and the creature alternately, and making it shrink and blink its eyes at the unwelcome puff. Then she laid down the fan and tied her handkerchief round its head and neck.

"Oh, you dear funny little old woman!" she said laughing, as she held it straight up and made it mew. Then suddenly she cried out to her mother: "Look, Mumsey! isn't kitty like the Vicomte! It has just his face, and kitty's whiskers are his moustaches with their queer waxed ends!"

For one of the rare times in her life human feeling got the better of Thomasina's suavity.

"How can you be so atrociously childish, Eva!" she said with strange passion snatching the kitten out of her sister's arms and tearing off the handkerchief. "For shame!"

Her anger, which was perfectly natural, spontaneous, unconsidered, was the best thing that could have happened. Had she acted for a purpose she could have devised no better play for the exigencies of the moment. Sir James was delighted. Had that excellent Thomasina been the victim, and the beautiful little rosebud only the object? Had the frosty Venus thawed, while the childish Euphrosyne had only sported and laughed and run among the flowers, and made believe to be in earnest, while all the time she was only in play? But that other had been serious; and the merchandise marked with his own broad arrow had been kept sacred.

This thought put him into a good humour, cleared off the mists and broke the invisible apron-string. He deliberately got up and went over to the sofa where Eva was sitting with half a dozen other young girls, and there before the whole assembly paid her that kind of attention which people call 'marked,' and which makes a clatter like the wind among dry branches; attentions which every one sees, of which every one makes his own interpretations and the significance of

which is by no means diminished by transmission from lip to lip. Mrs. Merton looked on at the scene from between her narrowed lids and wondered what was the matter? Her future sister-in-law was strangely moved; little Eva the comedian had acted to perfection; still it was acting. Mrs. Winstanley also had acted to perfection, but here again the rouge and stage lights were evident; there was a manifest undercurrent which vitiated the worth of appearances; and the widow for one brief moment thought:

"Shall I find it all out and put a stop to everything?—break it off with my brother, detach James, and expose their deeds to the world at large?" And then she sighed, her ample figure seemed to shrink a little together, as reason whispered to her: "No! It was better that Benjamin should marry, and Thomsina Winstanley was just the wife for him; and if Sir James had grown tired of her he would find some one else, even if she forced him to give up Eva. And why should not little Eva have what she herself, poor mistress of the art of soothing, could not continue to hold? She had to yield the place which had been hers—why not to this little fool as well as to another? Yes; she had to yield her place. It was the law governing the relations of Mature Sirens, and neither she nor any other of the class could help the fate allotted. Stopgaps—that is all! But the day comes when the church conse-

crates the peace of love; and then the stopgap of friendship is flung aside, no longer needed. No; she need not disturb herself or any one else by unnecessary discoveries and virtuous denunciations. The moment of abdication is always bitter; but she had known all along that it had to come; and she was too good-natured, too indolent and too rational to encourage unreasonable jealousy."

This was what her reason whispered to her; and she heeded the still small voice that so seldom leads us wrong, and never into folly!

Before the afternoon was over the chains which had been temporarily loosened were riveted afresh, and in the ardour of the reaction Sir James Kearney all but committed himself. He saved himself from the irrevocable words only just in time.

When Agnes Disney and her mother left, the conversation naturally fell on Hubert's marriage. Sir James was to be his best man, in spite of that unwelcome revelation, but the Winstanleys were not asked either to the church or the breakfast. They were invited for the evening ball, and that was all.

"What a nice wife Maud will make!" said little Eva with delightful enthusiasm. "She and Mr. Strangways are just suited. She is the very wife for him."

"Just," echoed Mrs. Winstanley. "I do not know any girl that I like better or respect more

than Maud Disney; and Hubert is the best young man in the world! He is the very ideal of a fine young English gentleman, but not 'all of the modern time!'" laughing.

To which Sir James said gravely:

"I agree with you. It is quite an ideal marriage; the very thing that should be; a precious combination of harmonious and mutually helpful elements."

And again Eva's wildflower face became crimson and the ungenial afternoon like a tropical summer's day. These frequent changes of colour and strange sensitiveness showed Thomasina, more than anything else would have done, how deep that matter with Bois-Duval had struck into the superficial nature of her little sister, and how it had gone through the froth into such substance as she had. But, taken with her bearing to Sir James, they showed her also that neither she nor her mother need fear. Eva knew her duty to her family and herself; and she would do it when the time came. If only that poor misguided fervid and unconvinceable rebel could have been made as malleable—would have let herself be taught with as much docility!—if only she had seen the things which were best for herself and for others, and had taken that heavy-handed iron-master with his millions in his pocket! In doing her duty she would have obviated the necessity of another's sacrifice; whereas now——. Thomasina put her

face into her hands as she sat in her own room thinking, and in spite of herself tears forced themselves through the long lashes and the slender fingers, and fell like rain on the frilling of her dressing-gown. Poor Thomasina! There was no help for it. She had vowed herself to the service of a master who demands the living sacrifice of love and maidenhood in return for wealth and worldly position; and there was no question with her of drawing back or of refusing to obey.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONFESSED.

"LESLIE, what can have become of that poor girl? Is she ill, think you? We have not seen her for days and days! She has never been so long as this without coming in; and it is odd that she should keep away after I had asked her so specially to come and see me! I am getting quite uneasy. What is the matter, think you?"

Mrs. Crawford asked this of her nephew-son as they were sitting together in the evening, she at needlework making a frock for the child, he with his microscope, intent on certain studies which were to land him in the Royal Society when they were complete. 'F.R.S.'—this was one of the points to which his ambition reached. Not that he would ever be anything but a chemist.

His theories went to the elevation of work by the thoroughness of the worker, not to the degradation of his profession through what is called the social advancement of the man. He was a chemist, a scientific explorer in his own way, an experimentalist and a discoverer. He would be recognized some day and receive his magic initials; but he would always keep the shop.

"I do not think that she is ill," he answered quietly. "She goes to St. Paul's Churchyard as usual; but she does not live now at home."

"No? where does she live?" asked the mother surprised, a little shocked indeed, and with a vague idea of wrong-doing somewhere that perplexed and distressed her.

"Somewhere in the Russell Square district, but I do not know the street. At all events she is no longer at West Hill Gardens with her family."

He was adjusting his microscope as he spoke; and he had never found it so hard to focus the object. That little bit of epithelium in the field was as if alive and seemed to fairly dance under his hand.

"But why has she gone?—what a dreadful position for her! Whose fault is it, I wonder?" asked the mother, womanlike.

"Not hers!" said Leslie.

A slight shade of displeasure traversed by suspicion crossed her face.

"How do you know all this about her, my boy?" she asked, trying to speak with indifference.

"By inquiry. I missed her and found out what had become of her," he answered quietly.

She looked up and watched his face. She saw nothing but the sad self-contained and yet perfectly honest expression familiar to her—nothing but the broad clear brow, the calm eyes, the handsome well-cut features where nothing seemed to be concealed and nothing was revealed.

"Why have you made all these inquiries about Perdita Winstanley?" she then asked, an idea of danger dawning over her mind like the presage of a storm in the sky.

"For the same reason which made you speak to me of her," he answered. "From interest in her."

Mrs. Crawford was silent. She loved Leslie like her own son—was he not her son through those long years of maternal care and then through his marriage with her daughter? To suspect him of a warmer feeling for Perdita than he would have for his own sister would be to take from him some of that love, because it would lower him in her esteem and take from him some of her respect. Her own heart was half broken by the death of her daughter, whose virtues she imagined and whose vices she had not known; and she would have thought him wicked beyond words had his been whole. If he were as good

as she believed him to be, he would be as unhappy as she was; and he would be as incapable of forming a new attachment so soon after his loss as he would be incapable of any other crime or dishonour.

"She is a good girl, but she has her faults," said Mrs. Crawford in a hesitating way.

"You mean that she is human?" he answered. "Of course she has her faults, but they are faults of temperament not of character—faults to be explained by the state of her nerves and the relative size of her heart and brain and lungs. They are faults for which she is scarcely responsible, as we mean by responsibility."

"Hush, Leslie! I cannot bear this materialism! It is sinful and atheistic to speak of an immortal soul as if it were nothing but a bit of matter, as if the spirit were subject to the conditions of the nerves and the blood! It is awful!" said Mrs. Crawford with a solemn kind of irritation. "Where will it all end if you begin like this?"

"Where will all what end?" he asked. "My judgment on Miss Perdita Winstanley's temper as influenced by her physical condition? Not in what you mean by materialism or atheism, dear!"

"Better men than you have gone astray," she said, still irritated and solemn.

"The truth cannot lead any one astray, dear mother. And one need not be a materialist—that is, a disbeliever in God and the immortality

of the soul—because one acknowledges the power of the body over the mind."

"The mind should be superior to the body and should control it," she said gravely.

"Up to what point?—the delirium of fever? the depression of jaundice? the suicide due to a loaded liver? or the homicide of sudden mania? We have power over ourselves only up to a certain point and under certain healthy conditions; beyond these we are no more free agents than so many stones set rolling down the hill or so many leaves blown about in the wind. But to go back to our starting-place. Miss Perdita Winstanley has no power over those quick blushes and ready tears, that passion against injustice, that necessity for truth at any cost which rule her physical and underlie her moral nature. She cannot help her self; and only time will be of any use to her. When she is sixty she will have toned down into just ordinary excitability; but it will take all that time before she does!"

"Rather a bad prospect for those with whom she may be connected," said Mrs. Crawford as drily as if a lappet of Mrs. Winstanley's mantle had fallen on her.

"Her best help will be in her friends," returned Leslie very steadily. "Those who love and understand her best will help her most. Believe me, she is not one to grow well in the atmosphere of rebuke and suppression. She needs

the sun; and tenderness will do more for her than condemnation."

"You seem to understand her with extraordinary insight!" said Mrs. Crawford, still less like herself than Mrs. Winstanley.

"Perhaps I do," he answered. "I have studied her closely. She has interested me."

"She must take her chance like the rest of us," returned the mother. "Neither she nor any one else can have the way of life made smooth. We have all to suffer and man is born to sorrow."

"Some have more sorrow than others if we all have our share; but I hope that Perdita Winstanley will be spared as much as possible, if only for the sake of the general sum of good in the world. She will be such a much better woman if she is happy than if she is unhappy! She does not want pruning and she will thrive so well where cherished!"

"Those whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," said Mrs. Crawford. And then the conversation dropped; but enough had been said to make the mother uneasy, remembering that Leslie was now a widower, made free by her own irreparable loss; and that if he chose to bring Perdita home as his wife there was nothing on earth to hinder him —safe the afreet of caste and the chance of the girl's own refusal. And this latter chance was worth—how much?

The next day Leslie went to St. Paul's Church-

yard and calmly waited outside the office of the Post-office Savings Bank till the girls streamed forth. Then, with the most natural manner in the world he went up to Perdita and held out his hand.

"What has become of you this long long time?" he said. "My mother has been asking for you."

"Oh, it is you!" said Perdita, with a deep sigh of sudden relief. Her pale cheeks flushed, then suddenly the colour faded till they were whiter than before. She smiled as if the sunlight had flashed over her face, and then her eyes filled with tears. "I am so glad to see you!" she said simply. "It seemed to myself as if I had lost you."

"Never!" he answered, taking her hand and drawing it within his arm, where he kept it clasped for a few seconds. "You will lose us when you wish it, and not before. Dou you want to lose us?—to lose me?" he asked. "I do not want to let you go out of my life—do you want me to go out of yours?"

Imprudent, unreflecting, impulsive, Perdita forgot all the proprieties at a blow. She knew only the passionate emotion of the moment, which demanded some kind of expression, else she should surely die of pleasure that had become pain, the ecstasy that had passed into agony. Her heart swelled, her throat contracted, her eyes grew dark.

"No," she said in a low voice. Then almost unconsciously, with no trace of boldness, of coquetry, of forwardness, only impelled by the overpowering instinct of Love, she pressed his arm against her beating bosom and clung to him with a fervent touch that betrayed her for ever—if indeed such betrayal had not been already made.

"My darling! my own darling!" he whispered, taking her hand and holding it as he had done before.

It was a horribly prosaic time and place, with cabs and carriages, drags and omnibuses grinding along the roadway, and passengers by the score jostling them as they walked. But Love annihilates time and transforms all places to the likeness of her own enchanted land; and to the two walking arm in arm along the crowded streets, Cornhill was as peaceful as Arcadia, this murky, sunless London as bright and glorious as Eden. To be there by his side, to feel that she had found him again, to know that he loved her, to say to him in her own way that she loved him—that was enough for Perdita. She had slipped off her mourning garment and had put on her royal robes—she had turned her back on the gloomy night of sorrow and her face full to the sun and to joy. And what she felt Leslie felt too—with as much intensity if with more self-control.

He looked at her with divine tenderness. Gratitude for her love, admiration for her sincerity,

respect for her purity, that yearning to protect her, such as men feel for the woman whom they love and who are alone, all contrasted with the reticence demanded by the newness of his freedom. Yet he could not let the moment pass without some binding word. It must be respectful to the dead who had not respected him, but it must be binding on the living. He would not spread his marriage feast on his wife's new-made grave, but he must know the future and be sure of it.

"Can you trust me and wait?" he asked, pressing her hand tenderly. "Do you understand me, Perdita?"

"Do I?" she answered, not looking at him. "I can trust you in all things," she added.

"You will trust my love?—you will wait until the mother can bear to hear that I am going to bring a new wife home? And you will be that wife?"

He spoke so quietly that the man who elbowed him as he went by did not catch the echo of his love—that the flower-girl sitting on the steps scanning the faces of the passers-by did not read the secret that was on his; but Perdita, poor Perdita! by the unstinted eloquence of hers made a policeman look at her twice and follow them for the whole length of his beat.

"Will you?" he said again, waiting for the answer which her very emotion strangled before it could reach her lips.

He felt her hang a little heavily on his arm, as if she had suddenly become tired and found walking difficult. And then through all the tumult of the thronged street he heard the faint soft "Yes" which was the rivet in the golden chain that henceforth was to bind them in a lifelong love.

But the strain was too much for her. He saw her face grow pale and felt her sway as she walked, and he had just time to place her in a cab, when, with a look of such supreme and ineffable delight as haunted her for days after—a look as if the divine burden of her soul for the moment crushed down her body—she suddenly turned to him as a child might turn to its mother, flung her arms round his neck and saved herself from fainting for a second time in his arms, only by a passionate flood of tears and the rendering up as it were of her whole being in that one self-abandoning caress.

He knew how to soothe her. His very voice could do that!—and when they reached his home in High Street she was not much more stirred than was usual with her, and only pleasantly excited when he took her upstairs to the mother.

"Here is our truant," he said, holding her hand as he led her into the room. "She has come to give an account of herself. I have not got the whole story yet."

No! only the essential part, the core round

which all the rest clustered, the keystone on which the whole arch depended!

"My dear, I am glad to see you. I have been wearying for you," said Mrs. Crawford, with a maternally affectionate kind of remonstrance in her greeting. "Where have you been all this time? what is amiss with you? I can see that something has gone wrong; you are so pale; and how thin you have grown!"

Perdita's chameleon-like face became instantly the colour of a crimson rose.

"I have been very unhappy," she said in her soft shy way. "But I am so no longer," she added, looking into Mrs. Crawford's face with eyes that shone like stars; and yet they were veiled and humid as well as bright!

"Come! tell me all about it. How long can you stay?" the elder woman returned.

"I can stay—as long as you like to keep me," answered Perdita. "I am not now at home."

It cost her something to make this confession; but she had to say out all that told against herself as bravely as the rest.

"So Leslie said. He said to me only yesterday that he was sure you were not at home. But where are you, my child? and why did you leave home?"

"Mother told me to go," she answered; and then she stopped.

"Why? what had you done to make her

take such a terrible step? Tell me frankly, Perdita."

Mrs. Crawford spoke with a certain gravity, a certain suspicion which in another moment might become condemnation.

The girl hesitated. How could she tell the truth? Though she did not know how, yet she did know the fact well enough—she had been sacrificed for Eva; she had been made the scape-goat laden with vicarious sins and sent out into the wilderness to expiate offences which were not her own, yet which it was incumbent on her by the laws of honour and kindness to conceal.

Mrs. Crawford turned on her an uncertain kind of look. Her eyes were half full of tears, while her lips were hard, compressed and bloodless. She was sorry, yet she was not satisfied. She sympathized but she suspected. Perdita's poor tortured face became white and scared. When should she be at rest? Was there no security for her on earth? She whose whole nature was sincere, whose whole life was honest, never knew what it was to live believed in and not blamed. What was this curse of condemnation and distrust that followed her wherever she turned? Even now it had come like the serpent into Eden; and she thought that her decree of banishment was to be pronounced here as it had been at home—that Mrs. Crawford was to repeat the miserable mistake made by her mother, and to augment it.

"I cannot, must not, tell you why," she said in a low voice.

"Do not pain her by asking, mother," said Leslie. "Let us respect her secret."

A smile flashed over her face that gave the impression of her having laughed aloud.

"Thank you; you understand me," she said with a glad blithe accent; and she held out her hand as to a comrade.

"Girls cannot have secrets which they may not tell yet which are not to their discredit," said Mrs. Crawford, speaking from the ordinary point of morality and common sense, and not over well pleased at this little incident of *camaraderie* between these two.

"In this case it seems that they can," said Leslie, holding Perdita's hand in his with as much respect as tenderness. "Mother, have faith! Do not let us prolong this discussion. Whatever it may be that has happened it is all right so far as she is concerned—my life on it!"

"Yes—indeed, indeed it is!" said Perdita earnestly.

Going over to where Mrs. Crawford was sitting by the table—her head leaning on her hand and her spirit full of doubt and distress, Perdita put her arms round the dear waist, while she knelt by the side of the chair and looked up into the pale pure face as she had done on the first day of her self-revelation.

"Believe me, dearest Mrs. Crawford, I have done nothing wrong—nothing even imprudent so far as I know," she said. "Yet mother has sent me away in anger, and I am in disgrace with all at home. I would not speak like this in silly riddles if I might tell you even what I know—and I don't know everything; but odd as it all sounds there is nothing against me; and if mother has been made to believe that I have done wrong she has been deceived."

Mrs. Crawford looked into the pleading upturned face. Sensitive, excitable, uncontrolled, passionate—but how honest! how sincere! No lie lurked behind those candid eyes—no wrongdoing turned to rust the silver of that pleading voice. Wherever the evil lay it was not here—and yet things looked so bad for her!

"Must I believe her, Leslie?" then said the mother speaking slowly.

"Yes," he answered with emphasis: "believe her implicitly, mother."

Mrs. Crawford sighed.

"It is against all my education," she said almost plaintively; "but I suppose Leslie is right. He generally is. I do trust you, my dear," to Perdita. "I am sorry for you and for all that must have happened to distress you, but I trust your word that you have not been to blame."

"My darling—my own dear dear—my second mother!" cried Perdita, laying her face on the

woman's bosom, and kissing it fondly, fervently. It was only a black stuff dress that she kissed, but it was better than nothing. At this moment she must have kissed something—had it been only the back of a chair.

After this she took off her bonnet and stayed for the whole evening, happier than she had ever been in her life before; and pleasanter, more delightful than the Crawfords had ever seen her. Though shy and tender she was not awkward nor embarrassed; when she was silent her face was eloquent of happiness, and when she spoke she had neither fear nor restraint. Her whole being seemed to have undergone some subtle strange transformation—as much so as if she had suddenly become clothed in light and crowned with an aureole like the goddesses and saints of old. She filled the room with radiance; her voice echoed like music and lingered on their ears like a song; she was the incarnation of all womanly peace, of all girlish blessedness, of all human joy; and Mrs. Crawford was no more able or willing to resist the charm than Leslie himself who had wrought it and for whom it was wrought in return. And when the evening passed and Leslie took her home, once more the great secret of life was translated for her benefit, and the earth on which we poor mortals live became heaven inhabited only by angels and the Divine—a place of glory beyond what it had been even in the summer when she

had first tasted freedom and had lived with Hope expecting Love.

When Perdita got home she found poor old Cluff in a state of trepidation. Queenly Thomasina had been there, and had sat for some time waiting for her sister to return. She had left, dreadfully annoyed, but with a message to Perdita, saying that she would call to-morrow at the same time, and her sister was to be sure to be in. She was greatly put out, said poor old Cluff; and then she added gingerly: "And where have you been, my dear?"

"At the Crawfords'," said Perdita, her face in the shadow; and her ancient governess asked no more. What with one thing and the other she found the Winstanleys difficult to deal with and dreaded those burnt fingers with which she was ever threatened.

But Perdita's curt reply was not from spikiness —quite the reverse; and so she made poor old Cluff feel by the kindness of her manner and the pretty affectionate little embrace that she gave her, as each took her chipped white candlestick and went to the bed which Cluff always said to herself was stuffed with chicken bones for feathers and knots and ends of rope, not honest wool, as was averred. And when the next evening came, Thomasina came too; according to her regal announcement of the day before.

The young queen came meaning to be kind,

with intentional condescension. Of course it was humiliating that one sister should be in the position to receive condescension from another; but we must take what we can get in this life; and it is the best wisdom to receive things as they are meant. And though Perdita resented the indignity of brow-beating, she endured meekly enough that of patronage from those whom she loved.

Wherefore when Thomasina drove up in a four-wheeler, with a twopenny bunch of chrysanthemums and six finger biscuits as her donation, Perdita received her with effusion, and very nearly spoilt all by the warmth of her welcome. For nothing was so unpalatable to Thomasina as excitement, whether of anger or of love. Wherefore she employed the first moments in snubbing that unlucky volcano into a more fitting and peaceful attitude of mind; and then she opened on her errand.

"You will not be long here now," she began. "Mother will soon take you home again, unless you are sillier and more wicked than even I give you credit for. Do you remember my telling you a long time since how it would be when Eva and I were married? Mother and you would live together then, and you would have no more quarrels. She is quite prepared to forgive you and take you back when we have gone. I thought you would like to know this, so I came over to tell you."

"What has mother to forgive?" asked Perdita

a little hotly. To her unsophisticated mind, wounded and sore as she was, it was she not mother who had to forgive.

"Well, we will not go into that now," said Thomasina coolly. "That is not the question. What I want you to understand is that Eva and I are going to be married—she to Sir James Kearney and I to Mr. Brocklebank—and that when we have gone you are to come home."

"Oh, Thomasina, how dreadful!" cried Perdita. "Eva engaged to Sir James when only such a short time since she was on the point of running away with that Frenchman, and you going to marry Mr. Brocklebank when——"

She stopped. Was it right to speak of his offer even for the sake of reminding her sister, who had however said that she had known all about it? It seemed to her something dreadful that this thing should be; but was she her sister's keeper? This proud, wise, far-seeing Thomasina, was she not fit to manage her own affairs?

"Never mind about Mr. Brocklebank, what he has done or what he has not done," said Thomasina. "All that concerns you, Perdita, is the fact. Now, mind!" she added, raising her hand as her sister was about to speak. "You need not say anything; the less you say the better. We are to be married on the same day, Eva and I," she went on quietly. "Since his engagement with her Mr. Brocklebank has become quite reconciled to

Sir James. If you remember, he used to dislike him so very much at one time. He will not tell me why; but that has all quite passed and they are now very good friends. So in about two months from now mother and you will go into the country to live. She has given up the lease of West Hill Gardens, and she has seen a place down at Horsham that she likes. It has a nice little garden; and though it is rather lonely I think it will do. Mother says she is tired of society; and you never cared for it."

"I never cared for society, but I do not think I should like to live in a lonely country place with mother only," said Perdita bluntly. "It would not be a very happy life for either of us."

Her heart sank with dread at the bare idea of such a thing. Alone with her mother—the most unsympathetic of all companions in the world—and Leslie? and her work? her opinions? her freedom? What anguish in the thought!—and yet--her duty?

"You surely would not let mother live down there in that dull place alone while you knocked about in disgraceful London lodgings?" cried Thomasina with indignation.

"My being with her would not make it any better for her," said Perdita.

"Perdita! are you mad? or entirely bad?" cried her sister. "Have you no spark of family feeling, of filial duty left in you?"

"It is not fair to say this," answered Perdita.

"You send me out of the house and banish me from home in punishment for something, I do not know what of which I have not been guilty, and then you expect me to go back the instant you want me, as a criminal who has received a pardon —some one disgraced taken into favour again. You expect me, Thomasina, to be a mere doll—a log of wood—a bit of wax that you can do with as you like; and you get angry because I object to be treated like this and say that I do not deserve it and do not like it."

"I get angry because you are so intensely selfish," said Thomasina; "because you can never forget yourself and your absurd ideas for the good of the family. If you had there would not have been all this disturbance, and mother would have got on as well with you as she does with us. But I did not come here to quarrel with you. I have proved my interest in you so far as to give myself all this trouble, first to tell you what is going on and then to make your present discomfort more bearable by letting you know that it will soon be at an end; but you are ungrateful, as you always are—you are just hopeless, Perdita, and that is the truth!"

She sighed in confirmation of her words; and she believed in them while she sighed.

"Let that pass," said Perdita. "I despair of ever being understood by any one of my own family"—her voice gave way when she said this,

but she continued bravely enough— "if you like to think so ill of me as you do I cannot help it, but you can at least tell me the truth. Tell me, Thomasina, what it was you said to mother which made her send me away? You said something; what was it?"

"I screened Eva," answered Thomasina. "It was better for every one that she should be screened. It would have half broken mother's heart if she had known—it would have prevented her marrying Sir James—and Bois-Duval would not have married her. It was better in every way that mother should think that you had been imprudent rather than that Eva had."

"And what did you tell her?" asked Perdita breathless.

The pillory for the truth—that she would have borne with a brave heart and unflinching courage; but the pillory of banishment from home, the pillory of her mother's displeasure, of condemnatory prate—and she standing there bound to keep silence—that was hard!

"I told her that you were going out of the house at twelve o'clock at night," said Thomasina quietly. "And I trust to your honour not to deceive her."

"And after this you expect me to sacrifice my whole life that you and Eva may flourish in your wickedness—never, never!" cried Perdita.

"Yes, you will," answered Thomasina. "You

will keep the secret for my sake and Eva's, though you bear the blame to the end of your life; you will live with mother at Horsham and you will be as happy as such a turbulent creature as you are can ever hope to be; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your duty and sacrificed yourself for your family. I know you better than you do yourself, Perdita, and I know what you are capable of if you are taken the right way."

"Not of this!" said Perdita passionately, thinking of Leslie.

"It will be this or nothing," answered her sister fixing her calm eyes on her with that cold, still, penetrating gaze for which she was famous. "It will be this—or you will be disowned for ever by mother and us all."

Perdita put her face into her hands and sobbed. What a dreadful life hers was! What a succession of heartrending alternatives! Her sister went up to her and forcibly drew down her hands from her face.

"Tell *me* the truth," she said sternly. "What is the meaning of all this?—are you in love, Perdita? Consider, and answer candidly."

"Yes," said Perdita brought to bay, but shrinking back.

"With whom?" her sister asked again, still stern and cold.

The rebel hesitated. It was partly the sense

of desecration, partly the pain of his humiliation that kept her silent; but the trial had to be met. Then the sense of his nobleness, of his mother's saintly purity, came about her like a golden cloud —fell on her soul with great peace and sustaining honour. She cleared her eyes and raised her head, looked her sister in the face, all shame, all hesitation, all shyness and bewilderment gone; her nervous agitation was stilled and she was only conscious of his worth and her own love.

"With whom?" she answered. "The noblest man on earth—Leslie Crawford the chemist in High Street."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TOILS UNLOOSED.

THE murder was out and the *dies iræ* had come. Henceforth Perdita was struck off the roll-call of the Winstanley clan—lopped like a useless branch from the genealogical tree—plucked up like a weed from the family flower-garden. Sorry as Thomasina was to distress her mother by telling her that one of her daughters had confessed herself so degraded as to love a shopkeeper, the fatal secret was too important to be kept from her; and thus the poor young princess herself was compelled to pain that one beloved being whose sorrows, had

it been possible, she would have borne on her own back or have piled on the shoulders of any vicarious Atlas who might have passed that way.

Yet when she knew of it, what could Mrs. Winstanley do? That fearful disgrace must go on if Perdita so willed. She was of age; and the English law recognizes no sin of rebellion against parental authority so soon as the magic age of twenty-one is reached. There is no *conseil de famille* with us to restrain the hotter-headed members; no necessity for *sommations*, respectful or otherwise, to obtain parental consent to an undesirable marriage; no Bastille to prevent the irremediable mistakes and punish the follies of the young; and Perdita was not quite mad enough to lock up in a lunatic asylum. Hence this terrible affair must go on, and the rebel must do as she would. All the same she should suffer for her misdeeds; and ostracism complete and crushing was the least that she could expect.

She dropped out of existence almost as if she had never bəen. Her mother and sisters kept her name as sacred as if it had been a spell wherewith to conjure up demons which could not then be laid; Sir James honestly forgot her existence; and Mr. Brocklebank had his own reasons for "preferring her room to her company," as he said to Clarissa.

To Mrs. Winstanley it was as if she had lost a child by something that was as final and not so

consoling as death; to Thomasina there was always the sentiment of disgrace lurking in the background and a shaky place in the foundations; but to Eva it was the pleasant carting away of something inharmonious and ugly, something that used to make her both cross and ashamed.

Meanwhile the two engagements went merrily forward, and in the absence of Perdita no rocks loomed ahead save one—that dreadful mass of debt which Mrs. Winstanley could not pay, and which as yet Mr. Brocklebank had not paid.

The ironmaster was far too shrewd a man of business to part with his money on statements made in the air. Let him go into the whole matter; have it in black on white, as he said; discover for himself the defalcations of that fraudulent friend; and then he would come down handsomely to balance the deficit. He would make all square when he knew the measure; but nothing short of absolute knowledge should wring a five-pound note out of him. He commenced as he intended to proceed; and he would be Mrs. Winstanley's good friend in proportion to the trust she reposed in him. No diagnosis, no cure; no statement of difficulties, no relief by cheque. This was logic: and he stood four-square on his position.

Mother and daughter were in despair. But it was flint and feathers. Not a spark was struck; not a cheque was conjured out of the ironmaster

on the faith of mere representation; and Thomasina sat and pondered, and thought again and again, what could she do to help that poor mother whose difficulties were increasing daily—with the wedding breakfast and the double trousseau to provide! She had but one resource—to go to the moneylenders on her own account, and trust to Providence and her allowance after she was married. It would never do to let Mr. Brocklebank know that she had made up a plausible story which had no truth in it save the truth of impecuniosity. She instinctively knew that her plea of filial piety would not stand her in good stead in the analysis of motives, and that her falsehood would be taken raw, unmodified by cooking or condiment. Like all who have to do with masses of men—rulers of things and hands--Mr. Brocklebank laid great store by truth. It was the moral police without which nothing was safe; and he forgave anything sooner than crookedness of statement or directer falsehood. When safely married, Thomasina thought she could brave all; meanwhile she must be careful to secure the price of her self-immolation, and to have handsome settlements through which might filter golden rivulets for her mother's benefit.

In appearance everything went on velvet. Sir James was desperately in love, and only as jealous as was necessary to give body to the cream and and redeem the sweet from insipidity. Benjamin Brocklebank was in love too; but he could not

divest himself of the feeling of having bought a fine work of art for which he was paying handsomely—a work of art that witnessed to his own good taste and solidity of capital. Lady Kearney, violently opposed to her son's marriage as she was, had nevertheless to give way and offer the tips of her lean fingers by way of congratulation:—James was a foolish undutiful boy, but he was her all, and it was better to accept his undesirable little wife than to lose him as her son. So she argued, and with pain and difficulty brought herself to act on her argument—accepting Eva as her daughter-in-law elect, but in the most niggardly manner that was possible, merely cutting the ground of complaint from under her son's feet but giving no foothold of satisfaction. Mrs. Merton however, had the grace to congratulate both Eva and Sir James as if she meant it. She accepted Thomasina with as much pleasant sisterliness as if she believed her really fond of Benjamin and honestly glad to be his wife; and she half closed her sleepy eyes, purred softly and spoke sweetly to all around, and was, as she had always been, the incarnate ball of swansdown with no angles to rasp even the most sensitive, and with soft pillowing for all the world. Mrs. Winstanley was the soul of maternal pride and ladylike satisfaction:—not rudely exultant as a servant-maid who had won the police sergeant, but serenely gratified, like a queen who has concluded an equal alliance.

The girls were all that they should have been. In Eva's wildflower face not a trace could be seen of the escapade, which it would be profanation to call by the noble name of Love; and her manner to Sir James was of the most bewitching and delicious kind—coaxing, childlike, artless, innocently suggestive of hidden feelings not yet revealed to herself and loving more than she knew; while Thomasina was the impersonation of gentle dignity and well-bred content. It was peace and fitness all round; and the absence of that inharmonious rebel helped in the general charm.

If it had not been for those odious debts the Winstanley heaven would have been cloudless, and the family sea without a rock, as has been said—but those debts! those maddening bills! and the insolent tradesmen who presented them!

Naturally Thomasina knew very little of business forms—still less of how money could be raised by young ladies of quality with only their pensions as the orphan daughters of a major to call their own. But she had heard of joining in cutting off the entail, of post-obits and IOU's, of bills at sight, of rent-charges and of mortgages; and she had a vague idea that she and Perdita together, both being of age, could mortgage, give post-obits, cut off the entail and draw bills and IOU's at pleasure—at all events that they could raise a sum of money for that poor darling mother of theirs which should set her straight for the mo-

ment:—what good to look ahead? Armour Court was one fact, and her settlements should be another, thought Thomasina. Meanwhile something must be done; and that at once.

Wherefore, ignoring the decree of banishmen', Thomasina came again to her unsatisfactory sister and proposed her plan of relief. She knew beforehand that Perdita would make no kind of objection, and would neither stand on her dignity as the Discarded who refused to be let down and taken up again at pleasure, nor show any petty feeling of malice or revenge. Selfish, as it had pleased Thomasina more than once to call this recalcitrant rebel, she knew that no one could be counted on with more certainty to do a generous action—no one was a safer moral investment than this poor social mole who groped her way according to the law of right rather than that of expediency, and preferred the ridicule of men to the condemnation of her own conscience. And the result proved her correct.

After her first outburst of wonder, pleasure, amazement, fear, all following each other in rapid succession, Perdita accepted her sister's plan as quite sane and businesslike. They would go to the old family lawyer; cut off the entail; give post-obits and IOU's; borrow money on rent-charges and mortgages to any amount; and then mother would have a sum of money to go on with, the rocks would somehow sink into the sea, the clouds

would vanish from the sky, and the velvet would be softer than ever.

And of course when they did go they broke their basket of eggs and found their rosy-cheeked apples mere skinfuls of dust. The old lawyer called them his pretty dears; explained to them their ignorance and his impossibility; laughed at their misplaced technicalities; and carefully buttoned up his pockets. So nothing was done here and the pressure remained as great as ever.

The day after this notable excursion into Lincoln's Inn Fields, because she looked sad and he asked her why, Perdita told the whole story to Leslie; and how her mother, apparently in the full tide of prosperity, was in reality on the very brink of ruin; when, if the rapids were reached, there would be a general shipwreck of everything—the home broken up, the seams and rents in the velvet displayed before the eyes of the mocking world and the marriages of the two sisters without question broken off.

She said it all to him one bright, brisk, frosty Sunday when they were in the Zoological Gardens, together with the privileged hundreds who liked to see the lions fed and to feel the crisp gravel scrunch under their feet and the fresh air blow on their cheeks. They were walking up the broad walk, she leaning on his arm, happy in spite of the tears which stood in her soft eyes—he more than happy in spite of the length of way which had to be gone before

he could call her wife and come to his inheritance of joy—when they came full on the family taking its pleasure too in the Gardens, all the same as the meaner sort. The two lovers were behind, each with his assorted love; and Mrs. Winstanley and Mrs. Merton walked in front as the vanguard of the little body.

"Mother!" said Perdita impulsively.

A spasm crossed her mother's face, but at that moment her conversation with Mrs. Merton touched such an interesting point that she neither saw nor heard anything beyond her companion. Certainly she did not see Perdita; nor did Mrs. Merton; nor did the two lovers; nor did Eva;—but Thomasina looked at her neither kindly nor unkindly—just calmly and genteelly—and gave her a little nod that lifted her out of oblivion but scarcely into real recognition.

It was very dreadful to Mrs. Winstanley to have this thing to do. She was horribly angry with Perdita; nevertheless it went against her mother's heart to 'cut' her thus in public. But it was impossible to do otherwise. How could she introduce Leslie Crawford, the chemist, to Sir James or Mr. Brocklebank as their future brother-in-law?—how present to them the chemist's affianced wife as their future sister-in-law? The thing was impossible! The great god Caste is a divinity not to be lightly disobeyed, and the necessities forced on us by our social position are imperative. She was but a

unit—one part of the great system; it was not for her to flout the unwritten law or break down the shadowy fence; and if poor Perdita's bread was bitter to the taste, who but herself had brewed the yeast for the baking?

Yet her mother cut her just as her eyes were full of tears for sympathy with those heavy maternal troubles—just as she had opened her heart to Leslie, and said with a sigh: "If only I could do something to help her!"

"Are you made unhappy by their passing you by?" Leslie asked after a short silence. He saw by her poor sensitive face how deeply the blow had struck—that face which never masked her feelings—and a thought passed through his mind born of as much disdain for them as of love for her.

"Yes," she answered; "I am very unhappy. Though I do not agree with them, I have always loved them. It is they who do not love me, not I who do not love them."

"Never mind, my darling," he said. "I will be all to you that they have not been; and perhaps I may do you some good even with them. They are to be bought!" he added bitterly below his breath.

But Perdita, looking up into his face, shook her head.

"If they knew you, you could do everything,"

she said simply. "But they will never let themselves know you; they will not give themselves the chance of finding out how good and true and noble you are."

"At least they shall find out how much I love you," he returned, pressing her hand against his arm, overjoyed by her praises which were true to him as exponents of her love if not of his own merits.

That evening, Sunday as it was, Leslie Crawford went to No. 100, West Hill Gardens, and sent up his card, asking to see Mrs. Winstanley. She wondered at his insolence, she said to Thomasina, and refused to go down. What could he want with her but some horrible annoyance?—perhaps to announce his approaching marriage with that degraded girl, and go through the farce of asking her maternal sanction; perhaps to remonstrate because of that public ignoring of his and Perdita's existence in the Zoological Gardens today; no, she would not go down to see him. She would send him away by the servant; she would not debase herself so far as to receive him.

Then said Thomasina in her quiet voice:

"I think I should go and see him, dear mother. No harm will be done and you will hear what he has to say. See him in the dining-room. He does not look an impudent kind of man; and if he is insolent you can always ring the bell and turn him out of the house."

"It is impudent enough his daring to call here at all!" said Mrs. Winstanley pettishly.

"Yes; but we had better hear his motive," answered Thomasina.

"If he has come to ask my consent to marry Perdita I shall not give it," said Mrs. Winstanley.

"Certainly not. That would make you a party to the affair; but there may be some other reason," said Thomasina.

And Mrs. Winstanley, who was by now completely under the influence of her eldest daughter, sent a message to Leslie Crawford, whom she had kept standing in the hall all this time, to the effect that she would be with him presently and that he was to be shown into the dining-room.

After a sufficient time had elapsed for the assertion of her dignity, Mrs. Winstanley went downstairs to confront this insolent chemist and druggist who dared to love that member of the family whom her own people did not think worth the trouble of keeping to themselves. He was standing with his hat in his hand, examining the prints hanging against the walls—standing and examining just as unconcernedly as if he had been in the house of an equal, and not of one so immeasurably superior as was Mrs. Winstanley, the daughter of a dead bishop and prospective mother-in-law of a live baronet.

She made him the stiffest, the haughtiest of courtesies in acknowledgment of his quiet: "Good

evening, Mrs. Winstanley," said as any other gentleman would have said it—with no washing of his hands with invisible soap like a draper across the counter; no staccato "Madam;" no tradesman's sign or manner anyhow; just—"Good evening, Mrs. Winstanley;" and then a slight pause.

"I dare say you are surprised at my calling," he said after a moment's silence.

"I am!" briefly replied Mrs. Winstanley. Her manner added: "and displeased."

"Perhaps you are aware of the attachment between your daughter Perdita and myself?" he then went on to say as coolly as if he had been Mr. Brocklebank himself, or a gentleman of high degree offering bags of gold for the pleasure of relieving Mrs. Winstanley of an onerous charge. Her grand airs evidently did not impress him the least in the world. He thought them silly, artificial, contemptible; and he was by no means overcome by them, as it was intended he should be.

"I consider your allusion to this an insult," replied Mrs. Winstanley.

"No, Mrs. Winstanley, no insult!" he said. "We have to look facts in the face; and this is a fact which must be accepted."

"No, I will never accept it! It is an insult," she repeated.

"Let that pass," he said. "I did not come to proclaim what you already know, nor to press a point that is already settled. I came to put your

own affairs on a better footing if I can, and to do what will make Perdita happier."

"The happiness of an undutiful and self-willed girl cannot interest me, her mother though I am," said Mrs. Winstanley, "Her happiness is her sisters' disgrace and my shame."

"Come, Mrs. Winstanley, not quite so bad as that!" said Leslie Crawford with a smile. "I am only a tradesman, I know; but I do not think you will find anything very far wrong in me, outside that damaging fact of the shop! I do not degrade you or your daughters by taking Perdita as my wife. Degradation does not come from the name of a man's business if the man himself be just and honourable. But I did not come to assert my integrity any more than to proclaim my attachment to your daughter."

"Then why did you come, pray?" interrupted Mrs. Winstanley glacially.

"I came to see if I could be of use to you," he answered. "Perdita tells me that you are in money difficulties of a rather pressing kind; and for *her* sake," emphasizing the pronoun, "to prove to you how cruelly you have misunderstood her, I, as her representative, come to offer you such help as I can give you. I have saved money, and I am ready to hand you over a certain portion for Perdita's dear sake, that I may buy your respect and better understanding for *her*."

Mrs. Winstanley was silent. She felt as we

do when we have braced ourselves up to deliver a tremendous blow—and strike in the air. She was prepared to anathematize her enemy—and lo! here stood her deliverer; she was sure that the pivot of this visit was insult and wrong; and instead she found only help and consolation. It was a cup of healing that he offered to her lips; but it was gall and wormwood all the same. It went against her pride to owe her salvation to this man; but pride must give way to necessity, and indeed her necessity at this moment was terribly great!

"You are very good," she faltered, her handsome face set and white; "but I am deeply involved, and perhaps you do not know what you offer."

"I cannot quite pay the National Debt," he answered with a smile; after all, it was for Perdita! "but I dare say I can manage enough to release you from your present anxieties. It is worth your consideration."

"Your terms of course are my recognition of your engagement to my daughter?" she said with all her former frostiness.

"No; but recognition of your daughter's self," he answered as haughtily as if he had been of her own blood. "For myself, Mrs. Winstanley, I desire nothing—I ask for no recognition—but I do demand for Perdita, whom I love better than my life, restoration to her rightful place in the

family. Cut me to your heart's content, but let me know that I have bought her re-admission."

"You are not selfish," said Mrs. Winstanley, scarcely knowing whether to like or dislike, praise or ridicule this strange man who did such a generous action with such an odd mixture of cynicism and tenderness, buying for the girl he loved what he so cordially despised for himself. "You have saved me from a dreadful embarrassment," she went on to say half hesitatingly. "I am pushed into a corner, and, frankly, I do not know where to turn. What a pity that you should be a chemist!" she added for the coda, sighing as she spoke.

"Rather, what a pity you should think a man's merit to be determined by his profession, and that a shopkeeper cannot have the instincts of a gentleman!" flashed out Leslie Crawford. "What a pity that you should make artificial classification of more account than natural worth, and hold a titled scoundrel as superior to an honest commoner. It is this false god of Caste which is the ruin of English society—this absurd belief in rank *per se* which is taking the true manhood out of our country."

"We must have dignities and distinction," said Mrs. Winstanley stiffly.

"It is more important that we should have men," said Leslie hardily. "But let us drop this discussion. It will lead to nothing useful. Tell me instead what I can do for you in your present

difficulties;—how much will release you?—and when will you ask Perdita to your house as a sister with her sisters? your daughter as they also are your daughters?"

"Dear child!" said Mrs. Winstanley, her displeasure melting as her pride succumbed to necessity and she prepared herself to accept this tradesman's money; "it was never my wish to banish her!"

Fortunately for the peace of all concerned Perdita herself shrank from going to the house when the lovers were about, and refused the offer to be her sisters' bridesmaid, which Mrs. Winstanley honourably made her by way of keeping her agreement with Leslie. The story of her engagement to the chemist had leaked out by now, and both the sons-in-law elect were furious—each in his own way.

"It is an unheard-of indignity—a crushing disgrace!" said Sir James after he heard this damning fact from his mother. "His brother-in-law the chemist and druggist," was a knife which she did not disdain to use, and which she turned in the wound with cruel persistency. "If your sister comes to the wedding," he said to Eva, "none of my people shall. If she cannot be prevented marrying that fellow at least she shall not be countenanced; and I for one discard her without mercy."

"Tut!" said Mr. Brocklebank, jingling his

heavy chain. "We will not be too hard on them. We will buy our drugs at their place—that will put a little money in their pockets; and I dare say I shall sometimes have a few old coats and waistcoasts that will save the tailor's bill. We need not receive them, but we can be compassionate and perform our part in alleviating their wants."

And when Mr. Benjamin Brocklebank, the master of Armour Court, took this tone, those who knew him understood the depth of disdain, the unfathomable contempt, from which it sprang.

"Mother has been saved, that is all I care for," said Perdita; "and by you, my best, my darling!—by the noblest man on earth, the wisest and the most generous!"

"Whose highest title to honour is that he is loved by the best girl on earth!" said Leslie, with a lover's foolish pride;—"one who has known how to appraise the things of life at their true value; who has thought love a better dowry than rank; a woman's duties higher than her rights; the quiet restrictions of home more precious than the excitement of liberty, the blare of publicity."

"Poor Bell Blount! I wonder what has become of her?" said Perdita. "How angry she was with me, and how she flung me off and turned against me!"

"Well for you that she did," said Leslie

"At one time you were in danger, but you were happily saved."

"By you," answered Perdita with infinite tenderness. "If I had not loved you I should have gone into the Movement out of mere despair at the aimlessness of my life."

"You do not repent your choice?"

"No! I never knew true happiness before; and I did not know that life held so much peace and joy for me as I find it does now when I am with you and I feel that you love me," she answered, looking into his face.

"And will to my life's end," said Leslie fervently.

All the same he was only a chemist and druggist, serving the public with rhubarb and colocynth across a counter; and she was the daughter of a major and the granddaughter of a bishop—a rebel and a democrat, not honouring, as she should, the purple lappet which fell across her soft smooth shoulders—the blueness of the blood which ran in her wicked veins;—not honouring anything so much as human worth and the truth of things, and that Love which alone makes our life divine.

THE END.

PRINTED BY J. F. RICHTER, HAMBURG.

HENRY KINGSLEY:

Old Margaret. 1 vol. (5.)
The Harveys. 1 vol. (20.)
Hornby Mills, and other Stories. 2 vols. (88/89.)

HOLME LEE:

Country Stories, Old and New. 2 vols. (25/26.)

LAURENCE W. M. LOCKHART:

Fair to See. 2 vols. (62/63.)

E. LYNN LINTON:

The Rebel of the Family. 2 vols. (165/166.)

G. MAC DONALD:

Wilfrid Cumbermede. 2 vols. (6/7.)

FLORENCE MARRYAT:

The Girls of Feversham. 2 vols. (94/95.)

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY:

Life's Atonement. 2 vols. (167/168).

E. C. GRENVILLE: MURRAY:

Round about France. 1 vol. (145.)

Mrs. NEWMAN:

Jean. 2 vols. (108/109.)

Mrs. OLIPHANT:

The Laird of Norlaw. 2 vols. (14/15.)
Adam Graeme of Mossgray. 2 vols. (31/32.)
At his Gates. 2 vols. (44/45.)

W. GIFFORD PALGRAVE:

Hermann Agha. 2 vols. (50/51.)

Mrs. PARR:

How It All Happened. 2 vols. (22/23.)
Adam and Eve. 2 vols (161/62).

F. M. PEARD:

The White Month. 1 vol. (159.)

Mrs. J. H. RIDDELL:

Home, Sweet Home. 2 vols. (86/87.)

F. W. ROBINSON:

A Bridge of Glass. 2 vols. (33/34.)
Little Kate Kirby. 2 vols. (137/138.)

WILLIAM SHAKSPERE:

Complete Works, edited by W. Wagner, Ph. D. 10 vols.
vol. I. II. (149/150).

ALEX. INNES SHAND:

Shooting the Rapids. 2 vols. (59/60.)

SIX MONTHS HENCE:

By the Author of "Behind the Veil." 2 vols. (73/74.)

SILVERLAND. By the Author of "Guy Livingstone." 1 vol. (83.)

H. M. STANLEY:

How I Found Livingstone. 3 vols. (54/56.)
Through the Dark Continent. 4 vols. (141/144.)

ANNA C. STEELE:

Broken Toys. 2 vols. (116/117.)

HESBA STRETTON:

The Doctor's Dilemma. 2 vols. (64/65.)

ANNIE THOMAS:

A Passion in Tatters. 2 vols. (57/58.)

BERTHA THOMAS:

Proud Maisie. 2 vols. (133/134.)

THOMASINA: a Biography. By the Author of "Still Waters." 1 vol. (24.)

MARY THOMPSON:

Robert Forrester. 2 vols. (112/113.)

ANTHONY TROLLOPE:

The Eustace Diamonds. 2 vols. (35/36.)
Fred Pickering. 1 vol. (66.)
The Three Clerks. 2 vols. (70/71.)
Phineas Redux. 3 vols. (96/98.)

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE:

Satanella. 1 vol. (21.)

Mrs. ALEXANDER:

Maid, Wife, or Widow? 1 vol. (9.)

COMPLETE LIST OF ASHER'S CONTINENTAL LIBRARY.

Each Volume sold separately, price 1s = 1 Mark.

WALTER BESANT and
JAMES RICE:
Authors of "Ready-Money Mortiboy" —:
Such a Good Man. 1 vol. (4.)
When the Ship comes home. (11.)

R. D. BLACKMORE:
Erema; or, My Father's Sin. 3 vols. (22/24.)
The Maid of Sker. 3 vols. (19/21.)
Lorna Doone: a Romance of Exmoor. 3 vols. (16/18.)

M. E. BRADDON:
The Dreaded Guest, and other Tales. 2 vols. (34/35.)

FRANCIS BURNETT:
A Fair Barbarian. 1 Vol. (55).

Mrs. B. H. BUXTON:
Author of "Jennie of the Prince's", "Won," &c.—:
The Ordeal of Fay.—We Three L.'s.—Violet and Her Lovers. 1 vol. (5.)

CHARLES H. EDEN, F. R. G. S.:
Ula, in Veldt and Laager: a Tale of the Zulus and Cetewayo. 1 vol.

The Hon. (6.)

Mrs. FETHERSTONHAUGH:
Kilcorran. 1 vol. (37.)

PERCY GREG:
Across the Zodiac. An astronautical voyage to Mars. 3 vols. (43/45.)

JOHN HABBERTON:
Some Folks. First Series. 1 vol. (29.)
Some Folks. Second Series. 1 vol.
Other Folks (54). (30).

FLORENCE MARRYAT:
Open! Sesame! 2 vols. (49/50.)

ETHEL COXON:
Monsieur Love. 2 vols. (41/42.)

HELEN B. MATHERS:
Comin' thro' the Rye. 3 vols. (25/27.)

"OUIDA":
A Leaf in the Storm. — A Provence Rose. — A Dog of Flanders. — A Branch of Lilac. 1 vol. (15.)

Mrs. J. H. RIDDELL:
Her Mother's Darling. 3 vols. (31/33.)

F. W. ROBINSON:
Coward Conscience! 3 vols. (1/3.)
Poor Zeph!, and other Tales. 1 vol. (36.)

DORA RUSSELL:
Footprints in the Snow. 2 vols. (39/40.)

JOHN SAUNDERS:
Jasper Deane. 1 vol. (28.)

HESBA STRETTON:
Author of "Jessica's First Prayer," "The Doctor's Dilemma," &c,—:
Through a Needle's Eye. 2 vols. (7/8.)

ANNIE THOMAS:
The Two Widows. 1 vol. (51.)

S. S. THORBURN:
David Leslie. A Story of the Afghan Frontier. 3 vols. (12/14.)

ANTHONY TROLLOPE:
Miss Mackenzie. 2 vols. (52/53).

ARTEMUS WARD:
His Book.—His Travels. 1 vol. (38.)

The Hon. LEWIS WINGFIELD:
In Her Majesty's Keeping: A Study of the British felon, drawn from life. 3 vols. (46/48.)

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE:
The Disturbing Element. 1 vol. (10.)

Published by

KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER, Hamburg.

Printed by J. F. Richter, Hamburg.

F. X. BEER,
k. Hofbuchbinde
MÜNCHEN.
Ledererstr. 25

BSB Bayerische StaatsBibliothek

MDZ Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek

Linton, Elizabeth Lynn,

The rebel of the family

Bd.: 2

1881

P.o.angl. 18 m-166
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11663598-9